THE NEW VOCABULARY OF RACE RELATIONS Ed Marciniak & Don Wycliff

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture

June 1, 2001

Mapping the Human Genome

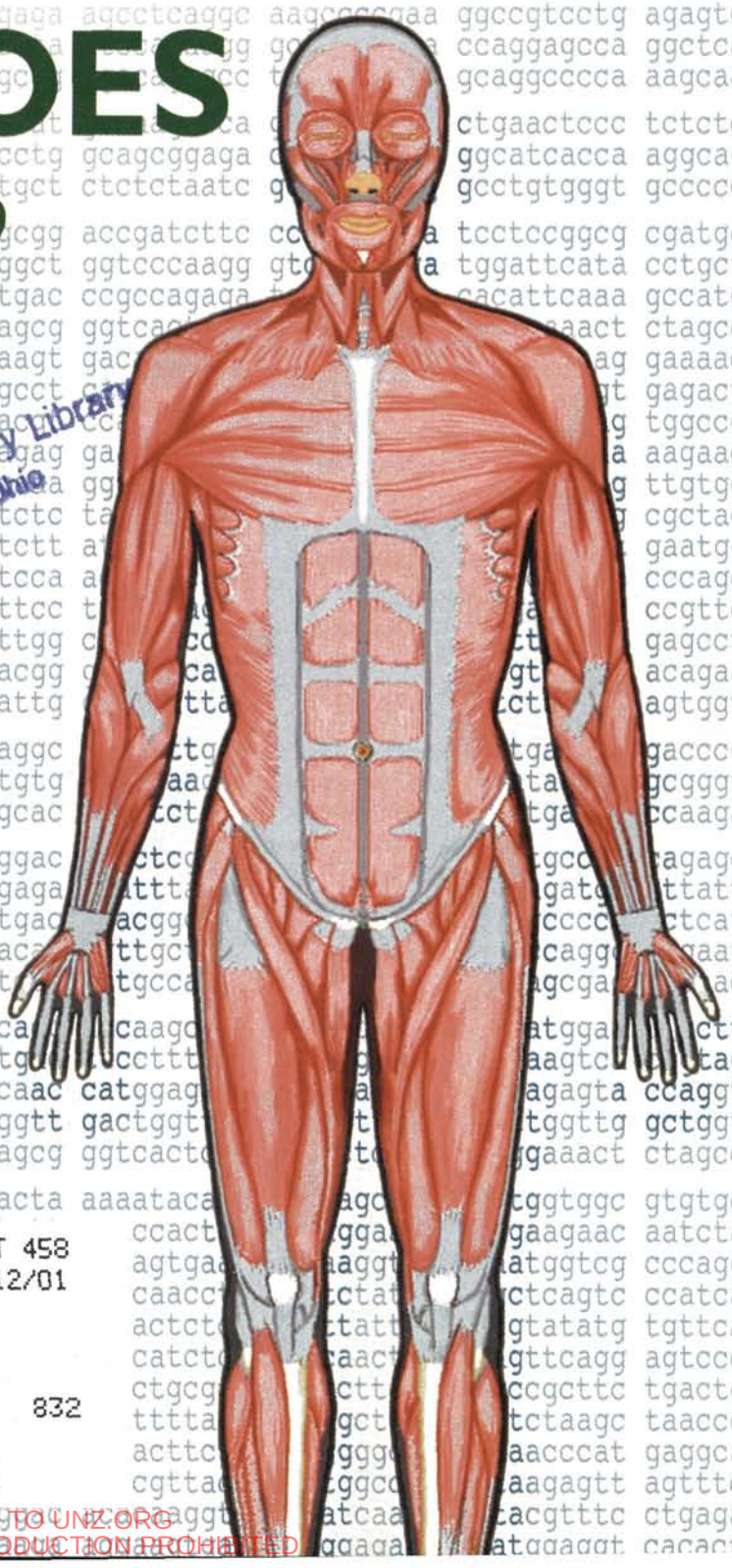
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Austin Hughes

John Cornwell

Michael Garvey

Sarah Appleton



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To the Editors

Lap dog

I loved Frans Jozef van Beeck's story about dogs in church ["God's Best Friend," April 6]. It reminded me of a dog named Buttons, whose master passed away—a good Irish chief of police in New York City (I was the chief's nurse). Buttons is still running around looking for him. At the funeral Mass I kept wishing I'd had the guts to bring him. You can bet that at any anniversary Masses for this man, Buttons will be on my lap.

JOY BANTA
Jupiter, Fla.

Better beasts

Regarding "God's Best Friend," Frans Jozef van Beeck's name indicates at least a Flemish or Dutch origin, but perhaps he has become "Americanized." For I can testify that dogs do visit churches in Belgium and elsewhere in Europe (usually with their mistresses or masters) and are at least as well behaved as they are in restaurants. My cultural upbringing as an American causes me to react badly to the presence of dogs in churches (and restaurants), but it does happen fairly frequently here, and no one seems to mind. They are sometimes even better behaved than the humans.

(REV.) PHILIP J. SANDSTROM
Brussels, Belgium

Due process due

I am dismayed at the procedures that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) uses in defending us all from doctrinal error and heresy ["Haight on Trial," editorial, May 18]. It is increasingly clear that I am not alone in this—distinguished theologians, canon lawyers, clergy, and religious have all been voicing their concerns.

Like 99 percent of Catholics, I am neither theologian, canonist, nor clergyman. I think most lay people, when we think about the situation, would agree that there is a need for the church to be protected from error. What sticks in one's craw is the way the CDF goes about this business. The term "due process" seems to be alien to the CDF.

Lay Catholics have no difficulty understanding, and trying to adhere to, the gospel call to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Many of us are forced to conclude that the CDF, however, in dealing with those it finds wayward, prefers the principle that the end justifies the means.

I believe it was the late Peter Hebblethwaite, who, in commenting on the pre-Vatican II period, wrote that Rome was not giving us leadership, it was giving us surveillance.

Sound familiar? BILL BRODERICK
Arlington, Va.

Founding father

As Father's Day approaches, I wanted to take the opportunity to thank everyone who wrote letters and articles about my father Edward Skillin, who died last August. Most *Commonweal* readers are aware of the contributions he made to journalism and the intellectual life of the church. I'm not sure quite as many are aware of the exceptional human being he was.

Father to five, he had infinite patience. He rarely raised his voice and never lost his temper. He was perfectly content to play board games or color with his children and later his grandchildren. While growing up, I was in awe of his faith. He attended daily Mass for most of his life, and still found time to pray throughout the day. He was passionate about golf, but didn't mind using clubs purchased at a garage sale or playing on a public course. He never lost his enthusiasm for his work, even when the location of the office changed and he had to spend several hours a day commuting—and he was by that time over ninety. Appeals from the many charities he gave to still arrive in the mail every day.

Father's Day this year will be difficult for me. These past months, however, have been made easier for me and my family by the many expressions of love and sympathy we've received.

SUSAN SKILLIN THUVANUTI
Bloomfield, N.J.

Repugnant, you say?

There is an awful lot of text dedicated to liberalism and Catholicism [see William Galston's "Contending with Liberalism," April 6]. I suppose this is necessary for the sake of scholarly integrity. It is absurd, nevertheless, to postulate an intercourse between the two. Catholicism and liberalism are repugnant to each other. To state it more simply, whoever is a liberal cannot be a Catholic and whoever is a (true and orthodox) Catholic cannot be a liberal. RICHARD SIZENSKY
Brighton, Mass.

The editors reply:

Why didn't someone tell us this seventy-seven years ago?! But on a more serious note, Richard Sizensky's stark juxtaposition of liberalism and Catholicism mirrors precisely the claims of notorious Catholic-baiters such as Paul Blandshard, who campaigned vigorously against the influence of the church and Catholics generally, as a threat to American democracy. It was not true in the 1940s—or the 1840s—and is not true now.

Lost identity

Considering that the issue Melanie M. Morey and Dennis H. Holtschneider address ["Keeping the Faith on Campus," April 20] has been with us for a generation, it is remarkable that their article is the first to confront it directly in a general interest Catholic magazine. Up to now, the problem posed by the disappearance of religious from Catholic campuses has either

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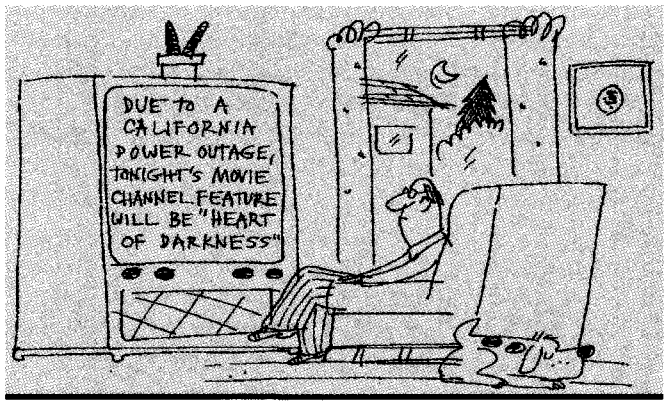

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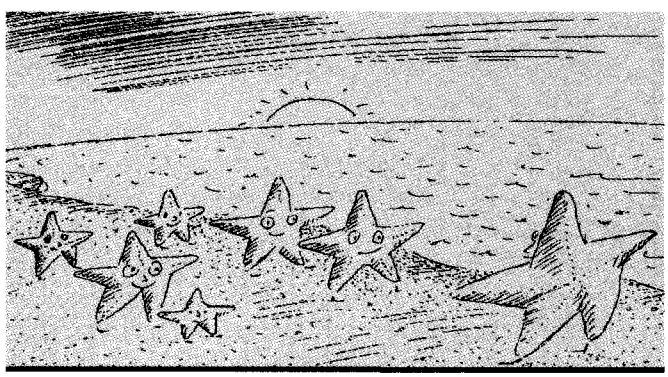

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been studiously ignored or frivolously dismissed as part of a gloom-and-doom scenario. By bringing the issue out into the open and setting forth the evidence, Morey and Holtschneider have put us all in their debt. However, I question their prediction that most Catholic colleges "will shed the particular spirituality and culture" of their founding communities and adopt instead "a more broadly based Catholic character."

This overlooks the fact that the policy of emphasizing an institution's "Jesuit," "Benedictine," "Ursuline," etc., character was adopted in order to de-emphasize its "universally Catholic" character. Though perhaps not consciously intended to have that effect when the practice began (probably in the 1970s), administrators soon realized that "Catholic" was harder to "sell" than, say, "Franciscan." Why so? Because "Catholic" had substantive religious content of an unattractively dogmatic coloration, while the "identity" of the religious community involved was, by comparison, insubstantial, undemanding, and easily sentimentalized.

Will the "more universally Catholic" college of the future emerge by way of a least-common-denominator melding of congregational "spiritualities and cultures"? The example Morey and Holtschneider cite—a place supposedly marked by warm friendships, high quality liturgical life, diversity of religious communities on campus, and education of the heart—certainly squints in that direction. And it raises Catholic universalism to a level of ineffability that virtually guarantees eventual secularization.

PHILIP GLEASON
Notre Dame, Ind.

Newman's advice

Over the years I have been wary of themed issues such as *Commonweal* is wont to publish. But nothing diffuse or over-broad weakened the education issue of April 20. Taken in tandem, Jean Porter's "Misplaced Nostalgia," Paul Crowley's "Finding the Catholic Thing," and the examination of changing governance at Catholic colleges and universities ("Keeping the Faith on Campus") by Melanie M. Morey and Dennis H. Holtschneider construct a vivid mosaic of the frustrating combination of promises and threats to faith's seeking understanding today.

Porter and Crowley demonstrate well why it was that Cardinal Newman called theology as practiced by the *Schola Theologorum* (not the bishops) "the fundamental and regulating principle of the whole church system." For left to themselves, those charged with the governance of the church and its institutions adopt "expedience" as their guiding principle, not truth or reasoning. So, like the boards of trustees that Morey and Holtschneider are studying, members of the hierarchy tinker with tightening governance structures and are diverted "from the real task at hand"—handing on a tradition of faith rather than erecting a religious ideology.

Newman saw that because theology was "commensurate with revelation," theology had a power of jurisdiction over what he called the political (governing) and popular (worship) elements in the church's constitution. As representative voices of today's theological educators, these authors have much to teach a willful and controlling hierarchy and a gullible public.

PAUL E. DINTER
Cortlandt Manor, N.Y.

Hitting the high notes

In "Planned Obsolescence" (May 4), Richard Alleva writes, "without glamour, masterpieces shrivel" in support of his contention that stars are necessary to carry the classics of the theater. His examples are telling, but my own experience differs, especially with Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet* is my favorite play—not my favorite by the Bard, but my absolute favorite work written to be spoken on stage. Not surprisingly, we have seen many productions of it, some with sublime actors, and others with thespians of significantly lesser skill. We have found with Shakespeare that if the artist, however meager his gifts, can hit the mark and say his lines with some semblance of proper diction, emphasis, and volume, it is much more than worthwhile.

My second point is on the availability of great actors for local repertory theaters. Alleva writes that stars of the highest order appear in local opera productions or concerts—which is true, but not in a way that is transferable to the spoken theater. He mentions Plácido Domingo and Andrea Bocelli appearing in Pittsburgh. The Steel City has a fine opera company and it might be possible to lure someone of that stature there, but only on Domingo's or Bocelli's terms.

A situation like that occurred last year when Bocelli appeared here in Detroit in *Werther*, a production that was devised to take into consideration not only Bocelli's blindness but also his not being suited to perform on the operatic stage. He has a beautiful pop-singer voice, essentially with one color, little support, and no nuance. Artistically it was a disaster, but it was a financial windfall.

Other superstars of the music world might appear in small venues. In these cases, though, the artist either has a short-run production completely tailored for her or she simply brings her concert to an audience. Both of these, however, are a long way from great actors in great roles appearing in regional theater in Chicago, Minneapolis, or Seattle.

ED WAFFLE
Detroit, Mich.

The author replies:

If Mr. Waffle finds it "more than worthwhile" listening to actors of meager gifts speak Shakespeare's verse with only the "semblance of proper diction," I can't gainsay him.

(Continued on page 30)

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Bush-league energy plan

Chicken Little and George W. Bush are wrong. The sky is not falling and, the current manufactured hysteria notwithstanding, there is no energy crisis. Not at least if you live outside of California. Even there, the crisis is not due to a lack of new power plants, as Thomas Higgins explains (see page 8). Elsewhere what is being opportunistically, even cynically, hyped as an energy crisis should be recognized as a real but hardly cataclysmic energy problem, a problem that begins with the notoriously contradictory American consumer (and voter) who regards cheap gas and electricity as a birthright. We want to power our (ever bigger) cars and warm and cool our (ever bigger) dwellings, but we don't want to pay the price—not at the gas pump, not in our utility and heating bills, not on the price tags of foodstuffs and other things transported long distances, and not with power plants, pipelines, transmission lines, and refineries in our backyards. We prefer to shift that cost to faraway places, to diffuse it into the less visible burdens of air pollution and environmental damage, or, better yet, to kick it forward to future generations.

To call the current tightening of energy supplies and consequent jump in prices a problem rather than a crisis is not to deny there are victims. Small farmers, independent truckers, and other small businesses, lacking the muscle to pass on higher costs, get squeezed. As always, people with low or fixed incomes are hit especially hard. If the Bush-Cheney energy plan were to focus attention on such victims, fine. If the plan were calculated to make the nation think hard about choices and costs, all the better. And there is nothing wrong with periodically and dispassionately reviewing matters that either liberals or conservatives have come to treat as permanently settled, including the potential of nuclear power, "clean" coal, off-shore drilling, and alternative or renewable energy sources.

Unfortunately, the Bush plan is an unbalanced rush to meet short- and long-term energy needs almost entirely by increasing the supply of fossil fuels and building new power plants. This emphasis on supply is economically and environmentally unsound, and it almost entirely ignores whole dimensions of energy policy like the painful boom-and-bust cycles and the impact on global warming.

What it proposes undermines thirty years of federal policy and thinking on energy efficiency and its benefits. Energy Task Force chief Dick Cheney's now notorious declaration that "conservation may be a sign of personal virtue, but it is not a sufficient basis for a sound, comprehensive energy policy" ignited an open war at the Department of Energy (DOE). Economists from the administration-favored Energy Information Administration, a DOE division that has traditionally promoted fossil fuels and downplayed efficiency, were openly challenged by scientists working in five of the department's national labs. Their studies conclude that energy efficiency by itself could avert the need for 610 of the 1,300 new power plants called for in the Bush-Cheney proposal. Their findings suggest the crucial importance of government-mandated efficiency standards.

The scientists' report, "Scenarios for a Clean Energy Future," published last November, argues that easy-to-achieve efficiency standards save enormous amounts of energy resources. Changes in building standards could spare the need for 100

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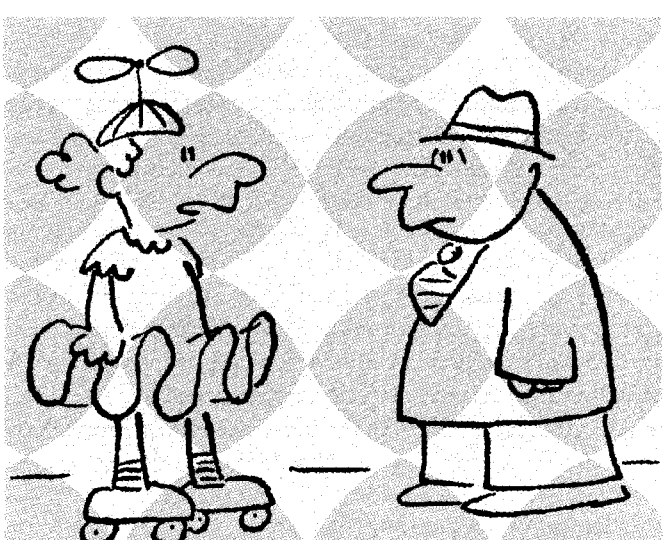
new plants; more efficient appliances (water heaters, air conditioners, washing machines, and clothes dryers) could postpone the need for 180 more. If Americans seriously considered where the 1,300 Bush-Cheney power plants—one a week for twenty years—are going to be built, including the nuclear power plant down the road, perhaps they would pay more for a washer that would make up that cost in lower electric bills.

The possibility of overall energy savings in government-mandated fuel efficiency is equally dramatic. If American cars and light trucks (including SUVs) got just three more miles to the gallon, the United States would save 1 million barrels of oil a day out of the roughly 10 million it imports. Contrast that million barrels with the six hundred thousand barrels a day that Bush-Cheney projects the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge would produce in 2010.

The plan's neglect of energy efficiency reveals a distinct bias toward extraction (should we be surprised?) from two former oil executives now in charge of energy policy. It's a bias wholly lacking in merit, economically or environmentally. Government investments in DOE efficiency projects have more than paid for themselves: By one estimate, the $12 billion DOE has invested in such research and development since 1978 has saved consumers $100 billion in energy costs. There are relatively clean, renewable energies (wind, solar, and fuel cell) that merit more government investment than the plan offers.

Burned by the swift reaction to Cheney's revealing dismissal of conservation as mere "personal virtue," the administration is now spinning its energy plan as "green" and conservation-conscious. To what extent does Bush manage to deceive himself as the first step toward deceiving the public? It is probably pointless to guess at the mixture of ignorance and guile in this. The truth is that the proposed plan's conservation components and environmental concerns are mostly minor, vague, and voluntary. Anyone believing otherwise probably also believes that the Bush tax cut is a big break for the little guy.



"I am part of the Bush-Cheney renewable-energy scheme."

Furthermore, not a few economists and other voices in the business community fear that the Bush-Cheney emphasis on adding supply, in the absence of equal attention to checking demand, will do little to temper the boom-and-bust cycles that have plagued American energy production and consumption.

This is a case where slow is good. Congress should subject the Bush-Cheney energy plan (developed largely in secret) to a detailed public scrutiny, conducting hearings on it, piece by piece. Democrats and less drill-happy Republicans should develop their own alternatives. They need not moralize about conservation and efficiency as "personal virtue," although they also need not be as curiously skittish of that notion as this professedly pious administration. They need only show Americans how individual choices shape the common good and how incentives and constraints have to be put into place so that we actually pay for what we want, rather than pushing the cost into our shared environment, someone else's backyard, or our children's and grandchildren's future.

JOHN J. EGAN, R.I.P.

Studs Terkel once said of Monsignor John J. Egan, for over forty years a field commander in battles for social justice: "He never met a picket line he didn't like." The *Chicago Tribune* once editorialized, "The man is a bit like flypaper: Touch him once and you are captured."

Ever since this eighty-four-year-old, bantam-sized giant of American Catholicism died on May 19, at home in the rectory of Chicago's Holy Name Cathedral, tributes have been flooding in from religious leaders high and low. But these strictly secular sources captured the two sides of Jack Egan that made him so special.

He knew the necessity of prophetic, even confrontational deeds. Which is why he marched in Selma; why he told moderates in 1963, begging for more time to prepare Chicagoans for integration, that "in all the years I have studied race relations I have yet to come across a community that declared it had enough time"; and why practically his last act was a public plea for justice for women within the church itself.

But he also knew the necessity of personal, political, and, yes, institutional action. Which is why he spent so much time bolstering spirits, passing out compliments, shaking hands, making phone calls, and building networks.

"You fight injustice wherever you find it and for as long as you find it. Because you never, never can stop loving, right until the very end." Jack Egan offered that summary of what kept him going, despite heart attacks and surgeries, successes and setbacks, over a decade ago. He was true to it to the very end.

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PAUL BAUMANN

CROSSING 125th STREET

I sometimes miss the elephants

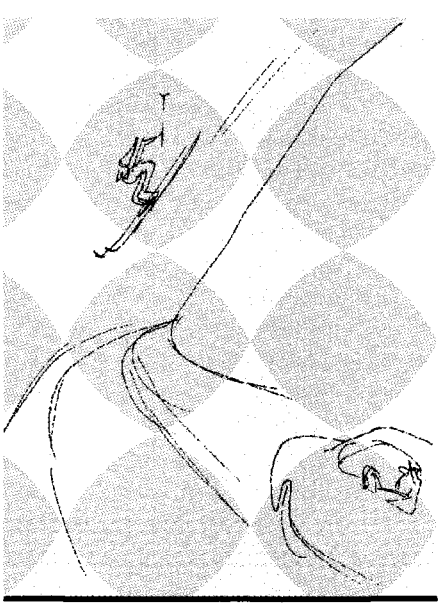
Twice a day I catch a bus across Harlem at 125th Street on my way between the Metro-North railway station and *Commonweal*'s office on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Usually the trip takes thirty to forty minutes. Traffic is especially bad in the afternoon. It doesn't take much—a slight fender-bender or Bill Clinton's appearance at his new 125th Street offices—to bring everything to a halt. If you're rushing with a commuter's grim single-mindedness to catch a train, the delays can be maddening.

Recently, I found myself stuck in the worst traffic jam I had ever experienced. The bus didn't budge for twenty minutes. I stared obsessively at my watch as the departure time for my train came and went. (From my agitation, you'd think I'd missed the last shuttle to Mars.) The still line of buses, cars, and trucks stretched ahead for several blocks. With no prospect of relief in sight, the bus driver agreed to open the doors and several of us scurried out and started jogging toward the station. I soon saw a large crowd milling about at the intersection of 125th and Lenox Avenue. As I got closer, it became evident that the attraction was not an accident or police activity. People were happy, not distressed or angry. Then I saw why. No more than thirty feet in front of me, striding majestically down Lenox Avenue, was an elephant. A very large elephant. High atop this apparition was a pretty girl in a sequined outfit waving giddily to the crowd. It was, of course, a circus parade.

I love the circus, or so I'm always telling myself. What could be more magical than to find oneself face-to-face with an elephant in the middle of one's dreary commute? But I'm ashamed to say that I did not pause to enjoy the serendipity or the lovely incongruity of the moment. I was so intent on not missing the next train that I hurried across Lenox Avenue with barely a glimpse at the clowns and acrobats or at any of the other circus animals. Offered an escape from my daily grind, I turned it down. Shame on me.

Commuting is a pain in the neck and a deadening ritual. One gets psychologically locked into a schedule designed to preserve a few hours of free time at the end of the day. Fearful of forfeiting that free time, you leave little room for the unexpected. Worse, you instinctively resent any disruption. Yet it is precisely the unexpected and the incongruous that we need in a world where everything from our teeth and crow's-feet to our children's genes is increasingly measured against one aesthetic or utilitarian standard.

The circus, not unlike religion, can give us a taste of an alternative standard. Ten years ago or so our family started going to the Big Apple Circus. That excursion was often the highlight of the summer, and we would marvel over the show for weeks afterward. The tightrope walkers and trapeze artists were always thrilling, especially in the Big Apple's intimate setting. But perhaps the strongest memory I have is of a contortionist, who got himself in and out of a Plexiglas bottle not much bigger than a commuter's briefcase. The spectacle was fascinating and gruesome at the same time. How strange the human form seemed—like a changeling in a fairytale—when folded up as compactly as a Swiss Army knife. How extraordinary that someone could conceive of such a feat and develop the dexterity to achieve it. In the way he played with our sense both of being a body and having a body, the contortionist seemed a kind of mystic.



"Man is incongruent within himself," writes the sociologist Peter Berger in *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (Walter De Gruyter). "Human existence is an ongoing balancing act between *being* a body and *having* a body....it is also possible that the sense of humor repeatedly *perceives* the built-in incongruence of being human." The circus, Berger adds in his discussion of the comic, presents an upside-down or counterworld, where the unnatural becomes natural and vice versa. Clowns, with their broad jokes and pratfalls, usher us into an alternative reality where status and accomplishment are mocked, human pretension deflated, and our common vulnerability celebrated. In Berger's terms, the circus is "an oasis of enchantment within the reality of modern rationality." And like all aspects of the comic, the circus can be a sign of transcendence. The "comic transcends the reality of the ordinary everyday existence; it posits, however temporarily, a different reality in which the assumptions and rules of ordinary life are suspended," Berger concludes.

Those rules were suspended when I encountered that elephant in Harlem. I wish such hints of the transcendent could be found more often, especially in church. I sometimes hear the tantalizing promise of incongruity, comic and otherwise, in the Scripture reading, but rarely in the sermon or elsewhere. Churchgoing, if not other aspects of our lives, should be more like coming face-to-face with an elephant at 125th and Lenox and less like commuting. □

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Thomas J. Higgins

THE POLITICS OF POWER

A letter from California

It may be that the first big crisis to confront any elected official is rarely the one he or she would have anticipated. John Kennedy did not foresee the Bay of Pigs. Bill Clinton probably underestimated the furor over his proposal to allow gays to serve in the military. And Gray Davis, a Democrat elected governor of California in 1998, certainly never imagined the mortal threat to the state's economy—to say nothing of his own career—from a dysfunctional wholesale electricity market.

Electricity isn't a subject that most people even think about. They just want to know that when they flick a switch, the lights will go on. But, as summer nears, even that is increasingly in doubt.

Until a year ago, no one outside the industry paid much attention to how California's new law deregulating the supply of electricity was working. The legislation passed both houses of the General Assembly unanimously, and was signed into law in 1996 by then-Governor Pete Wilson, a Republican. It is hard to imagine even a Pledge of Allegiance passing the California legislature unanimously, but this law had a broad base of support from large industrial customers, environmental groups, and the state's investor-owned utilities, such as the one where I was then employed.

The law might have worked as intended, with meaningful competition and a new era of cleaner, more efficient power plants. In other regions of the United States and the world, similar markets produced consumer and environmental benefits. But state regulators—the California Public Utilities Commission (PUC)—made two fateful decisions that created the conditions for a virtual oligopoly to exist and to set prices in the market.

First, the PUC compelled utilities to sell most of their existing power plants, more than the law required. That meant control of most of California's generating capacity passed to new, out-of-state owners. Then, the PUC rejected the utilities' request to purchase electricity from the new plant owners under long-term contracts, the way the vast bulk of electricity is purchased in every other market in the world. This unfortunate decision meant that the electricity needs of 20 million people had to be met every day in the spot market, the market for sales within twenty-four hours of delivery. As one trader put it, "California is short in a spot market for a commodity that can't be stored, and you don't want to be there."

Along with some painfully naive consumer activists, the new owners of the power plants had lobbied the PUC successfully in the spring of 1999 to reject long-term contracting by the utilities. The activists thought they were getting a more "open" market. The suppliers knew exactly what they were doing. Thereafter, they didn't need to collude or otherwise conspire to distort the market. They just had to read each other's bid signals. And beginning last May, that is what they did.

Prices, which had been fairly stable for two years, soared into the stratosphere, averaging more then ten times the previous year, despite similar conditions of supply and demand. Prices for energy bore no relationship to costs of production, even taking into account a rise in the price of natural gas, the principal fuel for the power plants. When the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) investigated prices last summer, they found them to be "unjust and unreasonable." This was a key finding, because federal law requires the FERC to take action to mitigate prices when it makes such a finding.

But the FERC refused. The commissioners were asked to impose firm price caps on a market that was manifestly dysfunctional, but a majority of them were ideologically opposed to meaningful price caps and resisted attempts to effectively control the market.

All through the summer, and into the fall, debt for power procurement at the utilities mounted. Under California's law, electricity rates were frozen, and so costs in excess of rates could not be passed on to consumers. The utilities were forced to borrow billions of dollars in the capital markets to finance power procurement for their customers and, under the law, they were not allowed to profit on the activity.

Banks and other lenders ceased lending money to the utilities in late November, because the PUC would not grant assurances that these costs could eventually be recovered. Capital is fungible, as every investor knows, and without such assurances no sane lender wanted to continue throwing good money after bad. Suppliers, fearing they would not be paid, responded by raising their prices even higher, despite the low demand of the winter months. Finally, the state was forced to step in and begin purchasing power in the spot market with funds from the state treasury. As the combined utility and state debts climbed past $20 billion, California's credit rating slipped and political gridlock set in. Finally in early April, Pacific Gas & Electric, the utility which serves San Francisco and Northern California, filed for protection against its creditors in federal bankruptcy court in San Francisco, and Southern California Edison teetered on the brink.

The role of Governor Davis has been central to the crisis. A man whose political life has been defined by caution and problem avoidance is now widely viewed as largely responsible for allowing a problem to become a catastrophe. For the first eighteen months of his term, Davis enjoyed great political fortune. The budget was running a large surplus and Democrats controlled both houses of the legislature. He is the most prodigious fundraiser in

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California's history, and two years before his next election already had banked more than $20 million for his campaign committee. The governor's first move was to blame his predecessor, saying that he "had inherited this mess." Then he blamed the FERC for not imposing price caps. It isn't hard to sympathize with both impulses, but that begs the question of what actions the administration needed to take to avoid a worsening situation. Aside from a handful of gestures, the governor did very little from May to December.

His closest advisors urged him to act forcefully to get power under contract and to calm the financial markets by assuring that transactions for power purchases would be creditworthy. But the governor was deeply concerned he would be blamed for even a slight increase in utility rates, and he refused to take action. Indeed, at one point he said, "I could have solved the problem in twenty minutes if I had been willing to raise rates." Much later, he had to.

In retrospect, the eight months between May and December were a crucial lost opportunity. By the time the governor finally began seeking long-term contracts, and conceded the need for utility rates to increase, it was too late to solve the crisis. Few power deals were available under reasonable terms, the premiums being paid for risk had become the largest element in the price of electricity, and Davis's standing in the legislature was so low that his own party was balking at passing his legislative package.

Davis hopes to salvage the situation through a complicated plan to purchase the transmission lines owned by the state's utilities so they can use the net proceeds to pay down their debt. It may still pass, but a lot of political capital has been squandered by the year-long delay, and most legislators are reluctant to approve the bonding required to finance the purchase. Last month the PUC approved an average residential rate increase of over 40 percent, which was greatly magnified by the long delay, but which further erodes the governor's political strength. PG&E's bankruptcy makes the resolution even more difficult.

It is not lost on Californians that much of the rest of the country often takes guilty pleasure when the Golden State is in trouble. But when California's economy stumbles, the rest of the country is also at risk of a fall. The electricity crisis is a cautionary tale about putting faith in markets without fully understanding how markets operate, especially for products with inelastic demand. Suppliers will always act in their own interests. When their interests conflict with the public interest, there are enormous market risks when political leaders won't lead. The price of California's political paralysis will be paid in higher electricity rates and a damaged economy for more than a generation. And the blackouts have already begun. □

Thomas J. Higgins *is a retired senior vice president of Edison International. He lives in San Francisco.*

Gordon Marino

KERREY'S CULPABILITY

Vietnam & the just-war tradition

Last month," Sixty Minutes II" aired a program in which Gerhard Klann claimed that on February 25, 1969, former Senator Bob Kerrey commanded and participated in the systematic murder of civilians at Thanh Phong in Vietnam. Klann, who was the most experienced member of Kerrey's SEAL team, insists that Kerrey personally helped him slit an old man's throat and then later ordered the killing of women and children. Klann's rendition of the events of that evening has been partially corroborated by two Vietnamese witnesses.

Kerrey has long acknowledged that things happened that night that he cannot exactly remember but would give anything to forget. As Gregory Vistica reports in the *New York Times Magazine* (April 29), "one thing is certain: around midnight on February 25, 1969 (at Thang Phong) Kerrey and his men killed at least thirteen unarmed women and children." According to Kerrey, his team was fired upon and he in turn directed his men to shoot into a hamlet but without any intent to harm noncombatants. Kerrey remembers feeling aghast when he learned that the people he killed were not exactly the Viet Cong fighters that were later registered in the body count. When Kerrey got home, he wept to his mother and his pastor about Thanh Phong. His remorse did not end there. In his Senate office, Kerrey kept a landscape painting inscribed with these thorny words from Emily Dickinson:

Remorse is Memory awake,
Her companies astir,—
A presence of departed acts
At window and at door.

Its past set down before the soul,
And lighted with a match,
Perusal to facilitate
Of its condensed dispatch.

Remorse is cureless,—the disease
Not even God can heal;
For 'tis His institution,—
The complement of Hell.

Aristotle teaches that we are not to be blamed for an action that results from an unavoidable ignorance of particular circumstances. He adds that remorse over the consequences of such an action is evidence of its being involuntary. Kerrey clearly is remorseful. But perhaps Aristotle was not Kierkegaardian enough to recognize a distinction between remorse and repentance. Though Kerrey now says that the medal he won for valor at Thanh Phong means nothing to him, he accepted the Bronze Star for his grizzly work. Haunted as he claims to have been, Kerrey does not seem

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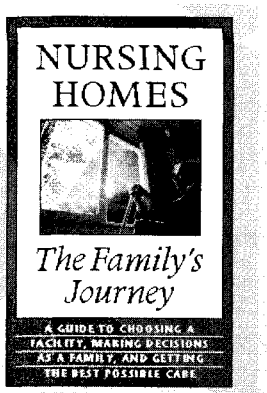
Nursing Homes
The Family's Journey
Peter S. Silin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to think that he is morally culpable for what happened. Just-war theory suggests otherwise.

In his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas provides the groundwork for much just-war theory. Developed by such thinkers as Grotius, Pufendorf, and in our own time Michael Walzer, this theory provides a moral framework for how soldiers should act in the chaos that is war. Everyone familiar with the just-war tradition agrees that a distinction must be drawn between combatants and noncombatants, for without this distinction war would not differ from terrorism. The intentional killing of civilians is proscribed, and so are military actions that show a gross disregard for the lives of innocents. Even on Kerrey's own murky account, he did not give a lot of thought at Thanh Phong to the possibility he was endangering the lives of civilians.

Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* (April 27), Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.), another highly decorated Vietnam veteran, proclaimed that Kerrey remained his hero. McCain added that unless you were there, you should not pass judgment on anyone's behavior in Vietnam. Apparently, if you were there you can't pass judgment either, as many of those who insist on the special moral circumstances of the Vietnam War seem to believe that everything was legal along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. After the Kerrey story broke, indignant vets entered the fray insisting that in Vietnam there was no distinguishing between combatants and noncombatants, especially in Viet Cong strongholds such as Thanh Phong. In certain sectors, they say, it was permissible to regard everyone, infants and grandparents included, as though they were grenade slingers. Vaguely defending his actions, Kerrey told a reporter, "There are people on the [Vietnam Memorial] Wall who died because they didn't realize a woman or child could be carrying a gun."

It is not hard to understand how soldiers fighting in a guerrilla war might come to view civilians in this way. But we cannot, I think, pretend to believe that in fighting such a war it is permissible to regard everyone not in a U.S. uniform as an enemy combatant. Or again, while we can understand how a soldier might panic and make murderous mistakes, both just-war theory and military manuals prohibit treating everyone in enemy territory as though he or she were attacking you with an AK-47. Kerrey's defense does a disservice to those soldiers—the vast majority, I suspect—who refused on principle to kill children. Kerrey was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for a subsequent engagement, one in which he lost most of a leg below the knee. No one has cast doubt on Kerrey's heroism in that instance. But by that same measure of gallantry, Kerrey did not hew to a standard of courage and moral discernment at Thanh Phong. Kerrey's Dickinson poem echoes the fact that he has for years wandered back and forth over the events of that night, wondering whether or not he should have done something differently. His ghosts are right. He should have resisted firing into Thanh Phong.

Bob Kerrey does not deserve a medal for what happened at Thanh Phong, but neither does he deserve to be villainized. We have known for a long time that American troops in Vietnam felt free to kill anything that moved. According to Kerrey, "We were instructed not to take prisoners." As William Pfaff has observed (*Commonweal*, May 18), "The truth that the United States has officially kept secret...is that atrocities against civilians were widespread in Vietnam, and were required by commanders because of the orders they were given by the government in Washington." But if Kerrey and other commanders were right to think that they were operating in so-called free-fire zones in which there was no distinction to be drawn between friend and foe, they still had an obligation to regard all the defenseless Vietnamese they encountered as prisoners of war, prisoners who possessed pertinent rights and were owed protections. Executing prisoners is also against the laws of war.

After many years of bitter controversy and division surrounding the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, that tragic conflict has of late drifted into a more peaceful place in our collective memory. Perhaps that sense of closure was premature. We owe it to the people buried at Thanh Phong to search our memory again. And we owe it to future generations of fighting men and women to consider the possibility that our guiding rules of conduct in that war were immoral. □

Gordon Marino *is associate professor of philosophy and director of the Hong/Kierkegaard Library at Saint Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota.*

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american catholics in the public square

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American Catholics in the Public Square is co-sponsored by the Commonweal Foundation in New York City and the Faith & Reason Institute in Washington, D.C. It is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

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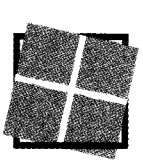

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RACISM ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE

But not everyone has noticed

Ed Marciniak

A new vocabulary is surfacing to assess the state of race relations in the United States. The operative words and approaches signal remarkable changes.

In the 1960s our racial language was dominated by "civil rights," "integration," "desegregation," "prejudice," "discrimination," "colored," and "Negroes." Nowadays, the comparable words and ideas have become: "racism," "diversity," "hate crimes," "racial profiling," "redlining," "reparations," "blacks," and "African Americans."

We are in transition, striving to find a racial vocabulary appropriate to today's society and culture. This is a touchy, controversial endeavor.

The 1960s, furthermore, emphasized equality of treatment—in employment, voting, housing, and government services. In the new millennium the stress has shifted to equality of results. Now the assumption of some is that ethnic and racial groups should be proportionately represented in occupations, incomes, wealth, college graduations, achievements, and failures. On the other hand, black athletes now dominate the nation's sports, such as track, basketball, football, and baseball (almost). Inequality is not the same as inequity.

The variations in language reflect the notable developments in race relations since 1963 when Martin Luther King Jr. gave his "I Have a Dream" speech to two hundred thousand people, culminating the March on Washington. Or since 1964 when Congress enacted the U.S. Civil Rights Act. Consider only a few of the changes:

In 1966, 42 percent of American blacks had incomes below the official poverty line. Recently, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 24 percent of the nation's blacks were under that poverty line. At the same time, the poverty rate for whites was 8 percent.

Nationwide, the count of black elected officials zoomed from some 100 in the 1960s to 9,000 in the new millennium. In political jurisdictions where the voting majority is of one race, candidates of another continue to gain office.

We now have a national holiday in January honoring a black minister who preached and practiced nonviolence. And it can no longer be claimed that 11 A.M. on Sunday is the nation's most segregated hour of the week.

Affirmative-action programs originally intended for blacks now embrace Hispanics, Asians, women, and/or gays. Some university affirmative-action programs give priority to students in poverty.

The reading public has come to realize that Toni Morrison is black and a writer. But she is not a black writer.

Hispanics will soon overtake blacks as the largest "minority." Meanwhile, efforts to create ongoing coalitions among blacks, Hispanics, and Asians have not been successful.

A growing number of blacks who have "made it" want to be seen as having arrived there by their own ability rather than affirmative action. In California, Florida, Michigan, and Texas, for example, affirmative-action programs based on race in college admissions have been challenged by whites, and also by some blacks.

These racial changes since the 1960s—and others too numerous to highlight—have encouraged a new generation of black leaders to recommend that priority also be given to those social problems that only tortuously can be linked solely to racism. They point, for example, to the prevalence of black-on-black crime, absentee fathers, the disproportion of AIDS among blacks compared to whites, the large number of single-parent black households in public-housing projects, and the poorly performing public schools in those neighborhoods. The victims of black crime are predominantly black.

That is why in Chicago last year, U.S. Representative Bobby Rush (D-Ill.) convened a summit on black-on-black crime and asked the attendees to "find alternatives to the culture of gun violence. It is critical we teach by example the true method of conflict resolution..." At about the same time, James T. Meeks, vice president of Jesse Jackson's Rainbow/Push Coalition, appealed to fellow blacks: "Let's stop blaming everybody else for the problems of black men and start doing something for ourselves. Yes, white folks have treated us wrong. Yes, there is an injustice, but we're doing a whole lot of stuff to ourselves. To black America, if you want to help, we've got to start in our own house."

Several years ago, the need for such self-scrutiny was dramatically summarized in the *Economist* (March 7, 1998):

> Black unemployment in desperate ghettos is not obviously the result of racism. Most of the worst-stricken cities are run by black mayors, after all; and social services that might once have ignored the plight of blacks are also run by blacks. Black entrepreneurs as well as white ones have fled the inner cities for the suburbs....A bigger cause of black poverty is that 70 percent of all black children are born out of wedlock....During

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the Depression, poverty was acute but families were more cohesive.

In spite of an era of high prosperity, the persistence of child poverty among blacks (and whites), can be attributed, in the main, to the decline in marriage and to the tide of single-parent households. Statistics for 1999 from the U.S. Census Bureau confirmed this conclusion: 50 percent of black children under six in families without a father lived in poverty, while only 9 percent of those in a two-parent family were poor.

While the new black leaders may echo the *Economist*'s devastating overview, they do not deny that racism exists. For them, however, racism as *the* reason for the durability of black poverty has become more difficult to substantiate. Consequently, they search for new ways to eradicate disparities in income, seeking additional means of uprooting black poverty. They struggle to have their voices heard and their proposals implemented. In doing so, they play down white guilt and black helplessness.

On the other hand, the racial gains since the 1960s, the disturbing social conditions within some black communities, and the calls for self-help initiatives have put traditional civil-rights leaders on the defensive. Disinclined to air "dirty linen" in public, they continue viewing the world through the prism of race. As a result, the civil-rights establishment now strives even harder to keep racism high on the nation's agenda and conscience. How? By shunning the more favorable data about black achievement. They publicize instead anecdotal data about racism's presence to garner support for their contention that the nation's 34 million blacks are still the victims and that racism is omnipresent.

In their eagerness, hyperbole often suffuses their arguments. Alabama's Southern Poverty Law Center recently claimed in a fund-raising letter: "I'm sure that you are well aware that our schools are racked with racial strife and intolerance against those who are different. Some call it a national crisis. Our communities are seething with racial violence. African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans are assaulting each other."

In their tug of war with the venerable civil-rights establishment, new—and increasingly influential—black leaders no longer seek to divide (victimizers vs. victims). Instead, they hope to unite blacks and whites so that together they will address the serious social problems that beset inner-city neighborhoods. Their first priority goes to reducing urban poverty. In the new millennium a new civil-rights agenda is being fashioned to promote two-parent families, curb street violence, improve public schools, reduce dependency on drugs, and uproot poverty. These objectives may prove to be more difficult to achieve than the equal-opportunity goals of the civil-rights movement in the 1960s, but they are no less worthy of pursuit.

Ed Marciniak *is president of the Institute of Urban Life at Loyola University, Chicago.*

Don Wycliff

Ed Marciniak is absolutely right when he says we are struggling for a new way to talk intelligently and usefully about race. But what inhibits such conversation, I think, is less the lack of a new vocabulary than the persistence of an old one: the vocabulary of racial guilt and innocence. Our whole racial "dialogue" has become a contest to establish or escape guilt, and, as a result, is shot through with dishonesty.

Most white people—or what appears to me to be most—seem intent mainly on establishing their personal innocence: innocence of racial bias, of discrimination, of any connection to or benefit from slavery. Not only is this beside the point, it's also impossible. One cannot escape the personal implications of membership in a society, no matter how personally blameless one may be. Where race in America is concerned, there are no innocents.

For their part, black people—or at least black leaders—seem more intent than ever on pressing the issue of white personal guilt: for slavery, for segregation, for lingering discrimination, for whatever deficits African Americans still suffer. More than three decades into the nation's effort to pay off that promissory note Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of in his "I Have a Dream" speech, black leaders seem intent on denying that anything at all has changed, determined not to "let the white man off the hook." As a black man, a Christian, and a person who has required the forgiveness and forbearance of others more than once in his life, I am deeply troubled by this particular gambit. The notion of acting as moral prosecutor and judge of a fellow human being strikes me as odious. I take seriously the scriptural admonition against judging others, "for the measure by which you measure is the measure by which you will be measured." There is nothing more foolish and unbecoming, it seems to me, than to go about peering into the eyes of others in search of motes.

(I am reminded in this connection of an e-mail sent me by a black friend of about my age, fifty-four, after the recent deadly school shooting in San Diego. It was a newspaper column in which the writer, a white man, urged other whites to face up to the fact that this kind of behavior was a white kid's malady. My friend underscored that point in his accompanying note. I didn't reply to him, but if I had I would have told him you could bet that, before this terrible phenomenon runs its course, there'll be a black kid somewhere who will do the same thing. There is no racial immunity to the sort of demons that possess children and propel them to such murderous lunacy. To think such immunity exists is to succumb to the pride that goes before a fall—and an embarrassment.)

Not only is such moral prosecution foolish and unbecoming, it's ineffective. Increasingly over the last two decades, white people have given evidence that they have hardened to this sort of thing, that they're through feeling racial guilt—

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whether they ought to be or not. Obviously, not all take this attitude, but a growing number that now seem to be a majority do. This refusal of guilt first manifested itself in the election of Ronald Reagan and has continued ever since—even through the two Clinton administrations. Paralleling this change has been another: the loss by blacks of the moral high ground that goes along with victim status. Frankly, given the very real and dramatic progress African Americans have made over the last three and one-half decades, it is hard to sustain the argument that we remain, as a group, victims of a relentless and unyielding societal racism. To be sure, racism persists and continues to distort lives. Probably in no area is its effect greater than in law enforcement and criminal justice. The ruinous rates of black unwed motherhood to which Marciniak refers are not unrelated to the depressing rates of arrest and incarceration of black men, so many of whom are thereby rendered "unmarriageable."

But to contend, as some black spokesmen do, that racism remains the defining fact of black life in this country, that "a black man just can't get ahead," is simply, demonstrably false. There are too many exceptions, too many success stories, for that to be true. Such exceptions are now, arguably, the rule. But it wasn't just a general perception of steadily increasing black progress that eroded the notion of blacks as victims and changed the moral equation on race. Had that been the case, I don't think there would be the raw edginess to race relations that is so much in evidence now. No, there was one very specific and singular event that, I believe, sealed the change. That event was the trial of O.J. Simpson and the reaction of black people to it.

It appeared to many whites—and I hear this every time a hot racial issue is aired in the newspaper—that a black man got away with murder in this high-profile case by portraying himself as a victim of police racism. Not only did blacks on the Simpson jury let him get away, but the black community at large applauded it, demonstrating thereby that racial solidarity was more important than justice. Or so the thinking goes. I don't think it was fully appreciated at the time what a watershed in race relations the Simpson verdict was. Indeed, grotesque as the idea may seem, the Simpson case is emblematic of what many white and black conservative critics consider the grievous defect of affirmative action and other programs of racial redress: a black man escaped responsibility for the killing of two white persons so that society could make redress for his supposed victimization by a social institution, the police. Take away the homicidal element and these critics see the same principle at work in, for example, the University of Michigan affirmative-action cases: In an attempt to redress historical social wrongs, less-deserving minority applicants are favored over more-deserving white ones. It's an argument that, it appears, the Supreme Court is ready to buy.

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So if there is unfinished business in the area of racial equality and the old vocabulary of racial guilt and innocence have become impediments, what's to be done? We could do far worse, I think, than go back to Martin Luther King Jr. for instruction and example. King and his "dream" are invoked so frequently and wantonly nowadays that I have almost grown tired of them. I know that's heresy, but there is a treacly quality to so much of the talk about King and his dream that it is like an overdose of candy. However, the fact is that King preached hard truths and he was not a man to take the easy road. He entered by the narrow gate—the gate of nonviolent direct action. You almost never hear anyone talk about that anymore. The genius of his approach was manifold. It involved direct action, an active challenge to injustice. But it was nonviolent, a refusal to use what he considered immoral means to achieve a moral end. It put the onus on those maintaining the system of injustice to respond—and to live with themselves afterward. It forced them to confront their consciences, not to listen to moral harangues.

That last fact is critical, especially in our over-the-top, in-your-face, finger-wagging age, when nobody feels any compunction about calling attention to the faults and failures of others. King had the grace and the good sense not to go about acting as moral prosecutor of his fellow humans—even if he may privately have considered them monsters. That may have been a tactical decision—like leaving room in a diplomatic negotiation for one's rival to gracefully back down, to save face. I like to think his belief in nonviolence was an expression of real grace, the result of King's having received forgiveness for his sins and thereby being inclined to forgive others. But whether King's attitude was tactical or something more—or something else entirely—I don't see any contemporary black leader who behaves that way. And that's a real loss because King's approach is the only way whites can be rendered receptive again to the need to exert themselves to rectify what remains of racism in American society.

We in the United States have made an amazing racial revolution over the last three and one-half decades. There may be another nation that has done as much, but if there is, I don't know of it. We must tell our people—black, white, brown, red, yellow—all about that revolution. We need to give ourselves a big round of applause. Then we must challenge ourselves—without condemning—to finish the job. And we must do it in terms that will cause people to nod "yes" instead of turning away in disgust. I personally am fond of those words from the preamble to the Constitution, the ones about creating "a more perfect union." Where is the Martin Luther King of our age, or the Abraham Lincoln, or the Lyndon Johnson, or the Cesar Chavez, who can speak those words in a way that will move us to the next stage of the struggle for American union? □

Don Wycliff *is public editor of the* Chicago Tribune.

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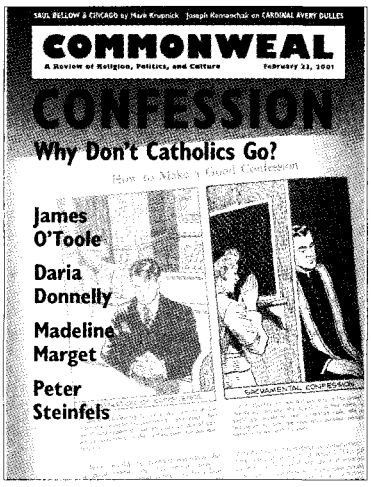

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THE GENOME & US

Introduction ■ "One doesn't want to get carried away, but I have to say I'm pretty carried away." That's how Francis Collins, who directs the National Human Genome Research Institute, expressed his exuberance over the decoding of the human genetic package, comparing its sequencing to the work of Darwin, Mendel, and Watson and Crick. Two scientific consortia, one public, one private, announced their distinctive but convergent findings early in February. The expected economic, ethical, philosophical, theological questions along with further scientific ones have yet to be fully formulated. In the lacunae between Dr. Collins's exuberance and the drear examination of the consequences, we thought there might be room for a few expansive, even poetic, thoughts on the discoveries that

- we humans have somewhere between 27,000 and 37,000 genes, rounded off in the headlines at 30,000;
- there is relatively little difference between our numbers and those of the mouse, the orangutan, or the fruit fly;
- some 75 percent of the genome is "junk" (described by science writer, Natalie Angier, as "the apparent product of a typing pool of drunken baboons"—are they, we wonder, the same typing pool trying to write Shakespeare?);
- the genetic differences between man and mouse being so small may leave a little room for nurture and culture—or at least more room than mice have.

We have asked a sample of the human genomic possibilities to reflect on the event. Here is what they had to say to us. THE EDITORS

Austin L. Hughes

I am fearfully and wonderfully made," said the Psalmist, and I can find no better words than these ancient ones to sum up my emotions as we enter the genomic era of human biology. Reports in the media have trumpeted the alleged medical benefits of having a genomic sequence—benefits that remain in the future and have probably been exaggerated. Others have warned of the dangers of the misuse of genomic data—dangers that, though real, have no doubt also been exaggerated. But, as we stand on the threshold of this new era, it is important, I think, that we let neither our hopes nor our anxieties get in the way of our wonder.

As with any great scientific discovery, the sequencing of the human genome gives us a glimpse of creation in its pristine splendor. We are treading where no human has ever trod before, and learning things about ourselves we could never have imagined. Among other things, a complete genomic sequence provides the storybook of our past, the record of our evolutionary history. Millions of individual genetic events (mutation, recombination, and probably other kinds of events of which we are now unaware) have made our genomes what they are today, have left their traces in the DNA sequence. Along with wonder, fear is indeed appropriate. This is sacred ground.

The story of our beginnings, written in our DNA, tells of how from common chemical elements of the universe and over eons of time God fashioned for himself a being capable of knowing him and returning his love. (DNA is made up of carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen, and phosphorus—"the dust of the ground," says Genesis.) We know there's more to the story: In spite of our indifference and even hostility, God loved us enough to become one of us, to take on our flesh (and our genome), to share all that we face on this earth, even a painful and humiliating death.

We say that "the" human genome has been sequenced, but really there is no such thing as "the" human genome. Of the 3.2 billion DNA base pairs making up each human genome, roughly 2 million differ between any two individuals picked at random from the population. There are 6 billion or so unique human genomes on this planet right now. Each of them provides a truly irreplaceable record, both of the history of our species in general and of the ancestry of the individual who bears it. Each of them, created for a unique place and time, guides the development of a unique individual. Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: "Christ plays in ten thousand places...to the Father through the features of men's faces." Yes, and through the features of their genomes too. For in a way we cannot now understand, one human genome is forever glorified in the one who is "seated at the right hand of the Father."

In biology, perhaps the biggest impact of having a complete genomic sequence will be an impetus for new studies of protein function. We need to figure out the physiological

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role played by each of the proteins encoded by those 30,000–40,000 genes. Many of these discoveries will no doubt lead to greater understanding of disease processes and will suggest new treatments. As for our culture at large, it is perhaps too soon to tell what the impact of the genome era will be. At the very least, an appreciation of the complexity of the human genome should lead us away from the naïve genetic reductionism that has been so prevalent for the past thirty years. Perhaps we'll see the end of simplistic talk about "a gene for intelligence" and the like.

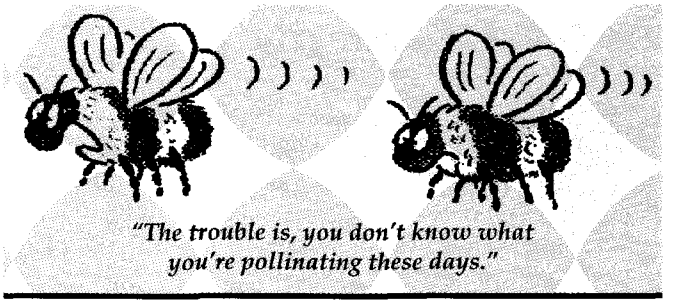
But I'd also like to hope that sequencing of the genome will restore to our culture an appreciation for the miracle of life. A nation in which millions of unique, irreplaceable lives are snuffed out each year because they are inconvenient to someone is a nation that has lost all capacity for wonder. We have lost touch with our human story, especially the part about a God who loves each of us in all our prodigious diversity. If the amazing journey recorded in the DNA of each newly conceived human being—and the irreplaceable human life for which it holds the promise—can fire our imaginations, we may begin to recover the wonder we have lost.

Austin L. Hughes *is professor of biological sciences at the University of South Carolina.*

John Cornwell

The social and ethical scruples thrown up by the science of new genetics are by now familiar. Who will benefit from the therapies? Will the gold rush for gene patenting be controlled? Will screening create a new underclass of the uninsurable and the unemployable? Should we be allowed to choose the intelligence level, the hair color, and the sexual orientation of our children?

But there is a question that affects the reception of all other questions: Which voice dominates the public understanding of the new genetics? Through much of the 1980s and 1990s the public perception of biology in the mass media was widely influenced by the rise of "neurogenetic determinism"—a synthesis of cognitive science and the new genetics that draws an equivalence between genes and human behavior. A man is gay because he has a "gay gene"; a criminal is violent because he has a "violent gene"; a woman is depressed because she has a "depression gene." The notion of neurogenetic determinism has been broadcast by a well-known group of biological reductionists, such as E.O. Wilson and Daniel Dennett in the United States and Richard Dawkins in Britain. (Reductionism seeks to explain phenomena in terms of their smallest parts.) Their books and articles have been hugely successful, but the notion that they speak exclusively for science is false. They do not. Still their simplistic message has a wide appeal in the mass media since garbled, sensational oversimplifications of science permeate public consciousness much more easily than complex, interdisciplinary arguments.



"The trouble is, you don't know what you're pollinating these days."

One of the strongest voices against hard-line reductionism has been that of Professor Stephen Rose, a leading neuroscientist and geneticist in Britain. Rose insists that the publicly accepted emphasis on deterministic nature is destructive of the very notion of community. "If the homeless or depressed are so because of a flaw in their biology, their condition cannot be the fault of society," although, he goes on to say, "human society may attempt, pharmacologically, or otherwise, to alleviate their distress."

The tendency to seek determined causes, and reductionist remedies, for our behavior generates a fatalism among those it stigmatizes. The fault, after all, lies in our genes, and moral agency is increasingly obscured and denied.

Rose and those colleagues who share his view, such as Richard Lewontin, argue that the hijacking of genetics by the media exponents of reductionism threatens to paralyze our social and moral sensibilities, with inevitable far-reaching consequences. "The new findings," Rose writes, "must be broken out of their reductionist mould" and located instead "in a more integrated understanding of the relationships between the biological, personal, and social."

Undoubtedly, new genetics are set to enrich our knowledge of human behavior in sickness and in health. But our ability to set limits, to forestall its potential for social and moral ill, depends upon the extent to which we integrate this knowledge with an authentic account of personhood and community.

The divide between what is given, what can be "made by human hands," and what we can do for ourselves, is in a process of dynamic change and exchange. We have the power to alter what is given as never before. The task ahead, then, is to find ways of understanding, and talking about, the mysterious marriage between the given and the made in the light of this challenging new science. That conversation is essentially pluralistic, and open-ended—calling for contributions from many disciplines and discourses. Crucially, however, even within the confines of the biological sciences, the science of genetics does not, and cannot, speak with a single, oracular voice.

Reductionist method may be a necessary condition for scientific experiment in the laboratory. It is not a sufficient means of understanding the significance of genetics for the social and spiritual realities of human nature.

John Cornwell *is director of the Science and Human Dimension Project at Jesus College, Cambridge, England.*

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Michael O. Garvey

Human animality is something with which certain sorts of writers like to startle the straitlaced. Eric Gill, who certainly knew a thing or two about animals, remarked in his autobiography that "man, physiologically speaking, is a pretty comic contraption—a curious bag of tricks, marvelously intricate and subtle and complicated and sensitive, but none the less comic." By way of illustration, he invited his readers to "fancy Mr. Neville Chamberlain having twenty-five feet of intestines and a heart going pit-a-pat all the time."

In recent months, a bunch of genomic cartographers, if I understand them, has begun to suggest that Gill and Chamberlain are no more genetically interesting than Marisa Tomei, who is herself no more genetically interesting than a nematode. The brainiacs who aced the organic chemistry exam are haughtily explaining to us benighted English majors that the human contraption is not all that complicated, after all, or at least no more complicated than that of a silverfish, a rhinoceros, or a penguin, no matter how comic it (or we) may be.

All of this makes me think that I've too harshly judged those playground bullies at Christ the King School who used to enjoy beating up the innocent nerds who were luminaries in our science classes. I could never condone their brutality, of course, but I think I now understand a little better what animated it.

Undoubtedly important as these genomic findings are, they will have the annoying consequence of emboldening the sort of cracker-barrel atheists who like to pose such triumphally iconoclastic questions as: If God is all-powerful, can he create anything heavier than he can lift? Har, har! It's depressing to speculate on the use to which these yokels will put the New Leveling.

But scientific breakthroughs should not be despised. How can we believers hope to know God without learning as much as can be learned about what he has done? How can we look exactly the same way on someone we despise, knowing how much genetic material he or she shares with the One who will come to judge the living and the dead?

And such discoveries as those made by the gene-mappers are seldom entirely without social benefit. When, for instance, my involuntary belch or off-color remark once again leads my wife to announce to our dinner-table companions that she has married a pig, I will now console myself with the knowledge that this very good woman is not being uncharitable—only a little imprecise. And even if there's no more than, say, 0.1 percent of genetic material to distinguish each of us from all the rest of us, we would all do well to ponder the amazing difference that 0.1 percent is able to make.

Just look at what Peter Singer, the Ira. W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics in Princeton University's Center for Human Values, has been able to do with his 0.1 percent: He's landed one of the most prestigious and lucrative jobs in the professorate while urging his peers to understand that "sex across the species barrier" need no longer be regarded as "an offense to our status and dignity as human beings." We have yet to hear whatever misgivings his academic colleagues may retain about bestiality or about Singer's benignly nonchalant account of it, but, all in all, this is a pretty impressive achievement for a creature that has discovered itself to be, genetically speaking, kissing cousin to a goat. In one of his most celebrated books, *Practical Ethics*, Singer solemnly admonishes "it is speciesist to judge that the life of a normal adult member of our species is more valuable than the life of a normal adult mouse." He may very well be onto something there, but the question must be asked: How many adult field mice have (yet) become Ira W. DeCamp Professors of Bioethics? □

Michael O. Garvey, *the author of* Finding Fault, *never resorted to violence on the playground.*

from *Book of My Hunger, Book of the Earth*

If I were to find true speech with you I would have to do so
by my mind. It would do no good to crouch down, look you in
your face and try to join the simple vowels of your long nose
to the joyful consonants flapping in your ears. It was the
smells, long ago, that drew the melody down to the trail away
from the echoes that start up within your ears, a terrible
division within, which that time has made and cannot heal.
You dart away from our hands and yet lie down as prisoner of
our eyes: waiting there, head on paws, searching, waiting with
that still faculty that looks towards me like an amber dream.
Dear animal, there is no place for my love to enter except by
my hands which find you, my palms and fingers which ruffle
and shake your fur. Yet now we live together many years
apart, expressing this tragedy of distance this joy of
breathing the same air

Sarah Appleton

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Rand Richards Cooper

KILLING TIME

'Amores Perros' & 'Memento'

Isn't the durability of film noir amazing? With its dark visions of violence and despair, 1940s noir drew from detective fiction, Expressionist visual aesthetics, and postwar existentialism to fashion a mean-streets romance of the anarchic underside of urban life. Half-a-century later, whether in movies that follow the classic formula, like *Get Carter* or *Croupier*, or in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* and its tongue-in-cheek neo-noir imitators, the genre lives on—a favorite of younger directors in particular.

Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores Perros* opens with a terrifying car chase, as two men ferrying a wounded, profusely bleeding dog in the back seat careen through the streets of Mexico City, pursued by an SUV full of gunmen. The chase ends in a fiery crash with a third vehicle, and the balance of the film lays out a triptych of stories (all titled, like short fictions) that radiate outward from this one horrific event. "Octavio and Susana" introduces us to the driver of the ill-fated getaway vehicle and his attempts to woo his sister-in-law away from his thuggish brother; "Daniel and Valeria" follows the woman driving the third car, a glamorous fashion model for whom the collision causes a steep downturn of fortunes; and "El Chivo and Maru" portrays an elderly homeless man wandering aimlessly near the scene of the accident, who rescues the hurt dog, and who turns out to be neither homeless nor aimless, but a former revolutionary guerrilla-cum-bedraggled eccentric who roams the city with his dogs, earning money as an occasional hit man.

The intricate script, by Guillermo Arriaga, links these urban tales not merely by their fateful convergence, but by theme—romance gone way wrong—and by the presence of canines, who complete the title's punning declaration that love is a bitch. That sounds cute; but believe me, *Amores Perros* is anything but. Octavio's story, for instance, takes us into the brutal world of dogfighting, where he tries to fund his fantasy of eloping with Susana. Played with dreamy ferocity by Gael García Bernal, Octavio gets caught up in a seductive, gangster lifestyle that González Iñárritu renders through montages set to pulsing Latin rap: dogfights, armed robberies, counting the money; illicit sex, fast cars, more money. A warning: *Amores Perros* is not for the queasy. There's more blood here than in an "ER" episode—in one unforgettable image, blood sizzles away on a griddle after a restaurant assassination—and there's a violence to Rodrigo Prieto's photography as well, the frantic glimpses from speeding cars, the shaky handheld cameras pulling ultra-fast cuts. There's no calm anywhere, except perhaps in the coolly sinister noir studies of rain-soaked avenues at night.

It's all suspiciously hip, especially for a debut director; but despite surface similarities, González Iñárritu rejects Tarantino's brand of stylized nihilism. Unlike *Pulp Fiction*, *Amores Perros* takes violence seriously, offering incisive moral studies beneath all the dazzle and noise. Octavio's story discloses a generous intention gradually corrupted by greed and the seductions of success. "Daniel and Valeria" administers a painful grace-under-pressure test to a magazine editor and his mistress, living in a love-nest apartment (along with their pampered Lhasa apso, Richie—another pun, suggesting nouveau pretensions). After Valeria sustains grievous, career-ending injuries in the car crash, her convalescence lays bare a dismal failure of love, dragging the couple into a pit of self-pity and raging recrimination where their former bliss is revealed as an illusion. What looked like happiness turns out to have

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"Where's my puppy?"

been merely health and wealth.

Finally, in the most affecting of the three stories, we follow El Chivo, the assassin, living in an old warehouse, mumbling fondly to his dogs, bickering with clients who want people rubbed out. Most young filmmakers would play this setup for indulgent irony—another hip hit man—and leave it at that; but González Iñárritu steers us toward a poignant epiphany. As it turns out, El Chivo (Emilio Echevarria, in a role of nearly Shakespearan profundity) yearns for reconciliation with the infant daughter he abandoned decades ago to join the revolution, and who believes him to be long dead. To see him lingering outside the apartment where she now lives, a grown woman, is to sense the tragedy of revolutionary idealism, which left him with a single useful trade—violence—and a haunted sense of having squandered his life loving an abstraction. It's a superb cinematic moment.

Winner of multiple awards at Cannes last year, *Amores Perros* has been lauded (by the *New York Times*) as "the first classic of the new decade." And indeed, the film weds a young filmmaker's stylistic brio to an old-fashioned humanism, giving us plenty of panache, but moral complexity and a broad social reach as well. González Iñárritu paints a lurid panorama of contemporary urban Mexico, a society brutally divided into winners and losers, driven by jealousy, treachery, desire, and the annihilating temptations of greed. He keeps his characters just this side of a moral abyss—letting them linger with a distant view of redemption before toppling them into the cauldron of violence that is this overheated, disturbing, and hugely ambitious film.

There's been a spate of trick-narrative films in recent years: *Go*, a Gen-X *Rashomon* that replayed events from three points of view; *Run Lola Run*, which used a similar replay to trace forking variations of fate; and *The Sixth Sense*, whose ending threw into doubt our entire viewing of what went before. Now along comes writer-director Christopher Nolan, who won't even let us *know* what went before. Until afterward, that is. *Memento* is a flashy noir thriller that gives the term retro a whole new meaning. Its gruesomely witty opening shows a Polaroid of a point-blank killing, with a hand shaking the snapshot dry. The image in the photo is so awful, we don't realize at first that it's getting fainter, and we're seeing time move backward. What follow are the details of death undoing itself—blood draining upward toward a victim's head, spent shell casings leaping up from the ground. It's a macabre bit of visual bravado.

The rest of *Memento* comes at us in short sequences that move forward—whew!—but are arranged in reverse, tracking back in time from the revenge killing toward the original crime that incited it. Nolan's hero is Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), an ex-insurance investigator trolling lowlife L.A. for the man who raped and murdered his wife. Leonard himself incurred a head injury in the assault, and suffers from a bizarre neurological deficit. "I can't make new memories," he explains. "Everything just fades." Unable to recall what happened last night, or even an hour ago, Leonard takes Polaroids of people, labels them with messages ("Don't trust his lies"), and sticks them in his pocket, for some continuity when the fog lowers again. This method would be hard enough if his goal were just to get down to the corner diner for a bowl of soup. But the poor guy has to solve a murder. As for us, *Memento* keeps viewers in a similar state of narrative impairment. Watching a film in reverse is a weird challenge. Clues such as a facial scar or broken window portend events to come; they are effects of prior actions to be revealed later, in subsequent (but chronologically previous) scenes, as we work our way forward toward the crime that began it all. Got that?

Duplicities and red herrings pile up, augmented by the film's reinforcing structures of uncertainty, making for a daunting epistemological game. Pearce brings a mien of agonized loss to his portrayal of Leonard, but Nolan does a lot of winking at us, and it's the winking that's most enjoyable, especially the joining of Leonard's disability to the rueful ironies and tough-guy attitudinizing of noir—the unscrupulous motel clerk who checks him into two rooms, knowing he won't recall he's paying two bills, or the femme fatale who taunts him: "It must be tough living from those little scraps of paper—you mix your laundry list with your grocery list, you end up eating your underwear for breakfast."

Nolan's ingenious feats of engineering both slyly comment on, and immensely complicate, the already byzantine plotting of film noir. His funhouse mirror makes watching *Memento* so arduous that halfway through, your brain feels scrambled. Life, Kierkegaard once observed, must be lived forward, but it can only be understood in reverse. Or maybe not. □

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Benjamin Ivry

DE PROFUNDIS

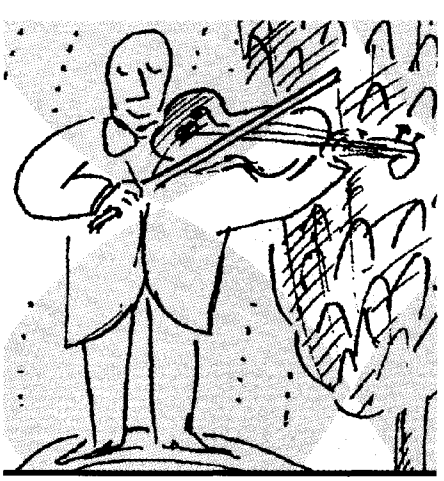
Verdi's searing 'Requiem'

The hundredth anniversary of the death of Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901), widely commemorated in the music world this year, reminds us that he wrote what is generally conceded to be the greatest and most popular work of modern spiritual music, the *Messa da Requiem* (1874). Studded with mighty choral episodes and a terrifying "Dies Irae" ("Day of Wrath") movement, the *Requiem* has been called—only half jokingly—"Verdi's greatest opera."

Operatic or not, the *Requiem* is certainly Michelangeloesque, and its wild and sometimes savage emotions require interpreters of unusual majesty. Feverishly passionate conductors like Arturo Toscanini and Victor de Sabata made recordings that seem to take us through death and judgment in a thrillingly vivid way. In the stomach-tightening "Dies Irae," the orchestral strings slash violently, a booming timpani is slammed so loudly that the audience jumps, and the chorus wails in agony about the Day of Wrath. The presence of a mighty chorus makes the whole experience a shared one, rather than a lonely odyssey, a vision of multitudes being judged that hails back to Dante's *Inferno*.

Unlike earlier Italian religious music (such as works by Pergolesi or Rossini), Verdi's *Requiem* resists excerpting, and contains no "hits." Its moving solo airs for soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and bass are almost never performed out of context. The composer interwove these melodies so skillfully with orchestral and choral elements that the solo moments cannot stand on their own, despite their grandeur within the *Requiem* itself. Verdi's *Requiem* is more unified than any of his operas. Even the seamless final ones, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, do not entirely share this perfect continuity. Such organic composing is like the buildings of the great Catalan architect Antonio Gaudi (1852–1926), which also seem to be living, breathing things, indissoluble assemblies of creativity.

Unfortunately, an outstanding new 8-CD set from EMI France, with some of the best historical performances of Verdi (*Les Introuvables du Chant Verdien* or *Verdi Vocal Rarities*), does not contain excerpts from the *Requiem*, or from Verdi's other sacred works, such as his Quattro Pezzi Sacri. The latter, containing an "Ave Maria," "Stabat Mater," "Te Deum," and "Laudi alla Vergine," was written by Verdi in his eighties. It is not a blockbuster like the *Requiem*, but as recorded by conductors like Toscanini or Carlo Maria Giulini, it conveys deep tragic emotion. In 1896 Verdi wrote to his friend Boito that musical "Te Deums" were usually performed "at great, solemn, noisy celebrations for a victory or a coronation." But his own "Te Deum," although beginning majestically, ends with the prayer "Dignare Domine die isto," which the composer called "moving, sad to the point of terror!" Like the *Requiem*, this "Te Deum" inspires fear as a dramatic element of religious emotion. Unlike Faure's gentle *Requiem*, this is not comforting or cosseting music, but a glimpse into the abyss. Indeed, Verdi told Toscanini, the solo singer should sound like "humanity that is frightened of hell."



The overt tragic nature of these works may in part reflect the fact that Verdi was considered by his contemporaries to be an atheist. Mary Jane Phillips-Matz's fine Verdi biography, which has just been issued in paperback by Oxford University Press, quotes Boito's opinion that "in the ideal, moral, and social sense he was a great Christian; but one must be very careful not to depict him as a Catholic in the political and narrowly theological sense of the word: nothing could be further from the truth."

Still, when the *Requiem* was completed, Verdi noted, "I have done nothing but write note after note, to the greater glory of God....Now the music is done, and I am happy to have written it." The exact degree and nature of Verdi's belief are a complex issue, easy to misstate. In the booklet notes for a new recording of the *Requiem* on Philips, conductor Valery Gergiev misleadingly claims that Verdi must have been a believer because "in his operas, people say *Dio* thousands of times." More realistically we may say that if Verdi never developed a sense of the love of God, nonetheless he possessed a convincing fear of God. His religious music is moving, dramatic, even thrilling, but always tragic. As with Greek drama, it may be emotionally cathartic but it is never soothing. Beyond the terror and abyss, there is only *mors stupebit* (stupefying death), as the shell-shocked bass soloist laments in the *Requiem*.

Admittedly, there is much in Verdi's secular *oeuvre* that is equally tragic. He had a dark view of human existence, accentuated by the tragic experience, at age twenty-five, of the death of his wife and small children from rheumatic fever. It was an appalling misfortune, one from which Verdi never really recovered. Certainly, the experience made it nearly impossible for him to believe in a benevolent God, and the tragic nature of his religious compositions reflects his suffering and lack of belief. □

Benjamin Ivry *writes often on music for* Commonweal.

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HarperCollins, $26, 432 pp.

Nicholas Clifford

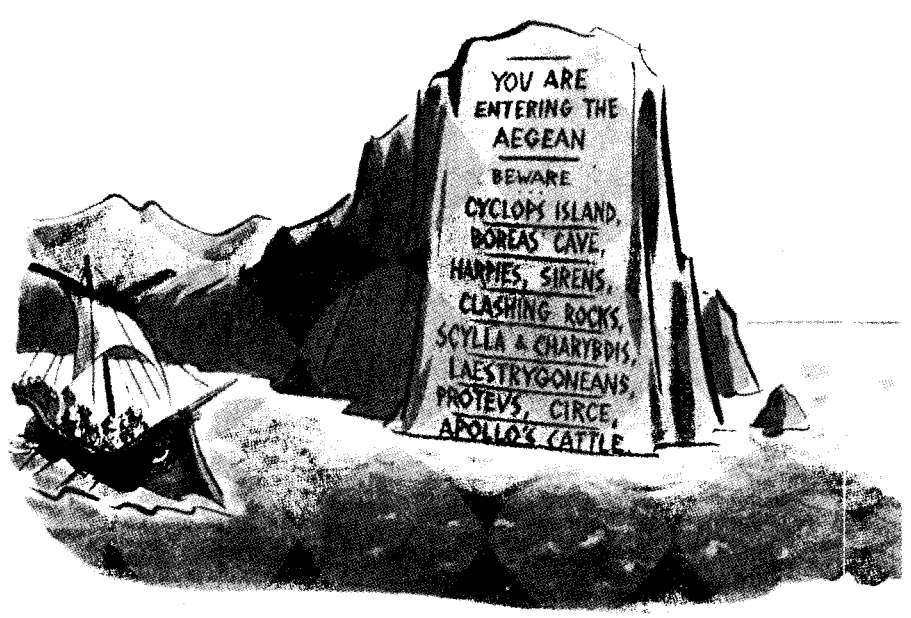
Peter Hessler's *River Town* is a gem, the best piece of travel writing I have read in many years. A Peace Corps volunteer, Hessler spent two years teaching English at a college in Fuling, China, one of those smog-palled concrete towns that tourists glimpse from the decks of ships cruising the Great River. The book is a gem not only because it is literate and well written, but because at its heart lies the Fuling landscape: the grimy town itself, the lovely hills and rivers that are its setting, and its people—the students, teachers, and others whom, as his Chinese improves, Hessler comes to know.

Unlike journalism, scholarly analysis, or even expatriate memoirs, travel writing generally makes no claim to the kind of expertise that comes from years of living in foreign parts, or grubbing around in the dust of the archives. Rather, it asks that we trust a record of things seen and heard, a record direct and unmediated by the knowledge and opinions of others. More than that, it appeals to our imaginative identification with the traveler, an identification we are less likely to make with the expert.

Yet as a record of impressions, such writing also implicitly warns that the traveler's own sensibility enters into the account and into the representations of the unfamiliar and the exotic. "Our observation in any foreign land is extremely superficial, and our remarks are happily not addressed to the inhabitants themselves, who would be sure to exclaim upon the impudence of the fancy-picture," wrote Henry James. Today, thanks to Edward Said and others, we are suspicious of any claims to accuracy in descriptions of the foreign. Perhaps that is why it has become common for narrators to place themselves at the center of travel writing, so that often it is they, more than the human and physical landscapes through which they travel, who claim our attention. The result is an all-too-frequent diminishment of those landscapes.

This is precisely what Hessler avoids. We learn something about him—that he is in his late twenties, a native of Missouri, a graduate of Princeton and Oxford, a Catholic—but these facts arise gradually and naturally through the book, and never become its focus. We learn also that he is a refugee from academic English departments with their "hopeless mess of awkward words: Deconstructionism, Post-Modernism, New Historicism," every bit as meaningless and hard to define as the terms that encumber his Chinese students—Historical Materialism or Socialism with Chinese characteristics. Both for Hessler and for his students, the literature they study is an escape from such constraints, helped by the enthusiasm they bring to it. "Nobody groaned when I assigned *Beowulf*—as far as they were concerned, it was just a good monster story."

While in China, Hessler also finds the time to travel, near and far. He camps in the green hills above Fuling, rides a ship upriver to Chongqing, visits Yan'an, sacred site of the revolution, where Mao made his headquarters during the war against Japan. He travels as far as Xinjiang, a western province on edge because of the tensions between the Chinese and its Uighur inhabitants, and then back down to Chengdu, capital of Sichuan, a fifty-hour train ride with no place to sit down, trying to take his mind off the discomfort with memories of hikes through the green and blue val-



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leys of the Valaisan Alps. On the road Hessler enjoys a traveler's freedom, unaccountable for what he says and does; meeting people, and talking to them about anything. When they tell him of the freedoms they now enjoy, he understands those in middle age are shadowed by the darkness of Mao's great famine and Cultural Revolution. For some, like the eighty-three-year-old priest of Fuling's Catholic church, the torments go back even farther, to 1949, the year of the Communist victory that Father Li, with no irony, refers to (like all other Chinese) as "Liberation."

Hessler—and Adam Meier, his fellow volunteer—are never allowed to forget that they are the only foreigners in Fuling. Besides the friendliness and generosity they find all around them can come trouble—insults shouted, rocks thrown. In one such encounter, Hessler loses his temper. Though the crowd takes his side, he is later deeply ashamed: "I had been educated at Princeton and Oxford, and yet for some reason I felt the need to face off with a Sichuanese shoeshine man until the locals said he had no culture." When he and Meier are photographing the town shortly before they leave, a crowd turns into a mob, and the Americans have to force their way to safety. Watching the tape later, they can't explain it: "All it showed was a blunt useless truth about life on the streets of Fuling: after two years we were still *waiguoren* [foreigners], both in the way we acted and in the way people saw us."

This kind of honesty is one of the book's strongest points, for with it goes an enormous sense of respect for his students, and for the people of Fuling. Never is Hessler tempted to make fun of them, even when explaining what happens when they encounter Shakespeare with Chinese Characteristics. There are no nudges of the elbow, no sly little ironic jokes either at their expense or at his own. He listens. He learns. And he writes beautifully. □

Nicholas Clifford's *study of travel writing about China,* A Truthful Impression of the Country, *will be published this summer by the University of Michigan Press.*

WANTED: THE VISION THING

Why Religion Matters
The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief
Huston Smith
HarperSanFrancisco, $25, 290 pp.

Humanity
A Moral History of the 20th Century
Jonathan Glover
Yale University Press, $27.95, 464 pp.

Paul J. Griffiths

The books under review here are alike in their conviction that something is deeply wrong with us. They also share a concern for suggesting what might be done about it. They differ in almost every other respect, but in these shared interests they both belong to the ancient and always fascinating genre of the jeremiad. Huston Smith's jeremiad is chattily Californian while Jonathan Glover's is gloomily British (and much closer to Jeremiah in tone); but each has a lesson to teach that he thinks we ignore at our peril.

Huston Smith has had a long and public career as an apologist for the significance of religion and a defender and explainer of the category "religion." He is the author of what may still be the most widely used introductory textbook on religion, and has written much in both scholarly and popular genres on the topic. Most of his work is upbeat, to the taste of this reviewer almost relentlessly so: he understands religion as a force for good and has been largely concerned to extol its virtues. But in this book his tone darkens: he is worried by what he sees as the contemporary constriction of our spirits and is critical of the cultural forces that have caused or at least permitted this. We—and Smith's "we" is, for the most part, contemporary middle-class citizens of the United States—have, he says, entered a tunnel whose end we cannot see and whose walls turn our gaze away from the world beyond us and back upon ourselves. This constriction prevents us from having a Big Picture (the upper case is his preference for this phrase), a view of things as a whole from which we can derive a sense of meaning and direction for our lives. The long-term absence of any such view starves the spirit and brings with it varieties of malaise. This narcissistic spiritual starvation is, for Smith, our fundamental problem as the third millennium begins.

The irreligious tunnel we've entered and from which we cannot see a way out is, above all else, a creature of the scientism and materialism of modernity. These are, in Smith's understanding, imperialist and exclusivist views. Their widespread dominance is supported by secularized universities, assumed by television and the press, buttressed in the United States by the recent practice of reading the religion clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution in such a way as to prohibit support or toleration of any religious activity on the part of the state. All this makes it impossible for us to take seriously any non- or anti-materialist Big Pictures. As a result, we cannot be seriously religious—or at least, those in charge, the intellectuals and the media barons and the aggressively materialistic advocates of scientism, cannot be, and this means that serious religion is no part of our public life.

For Smith, in this book as in many of his others, religion (not any particular religion, but rather any and every "organized, institutionalized spirituality," which is one of his definitions of religion) is the answer to these problems. Having a Big Picture will give us access to meaning and will permit us, spiritually speaking, to breathe freely again and to have a more complete view of things. Life without such a Big Picture

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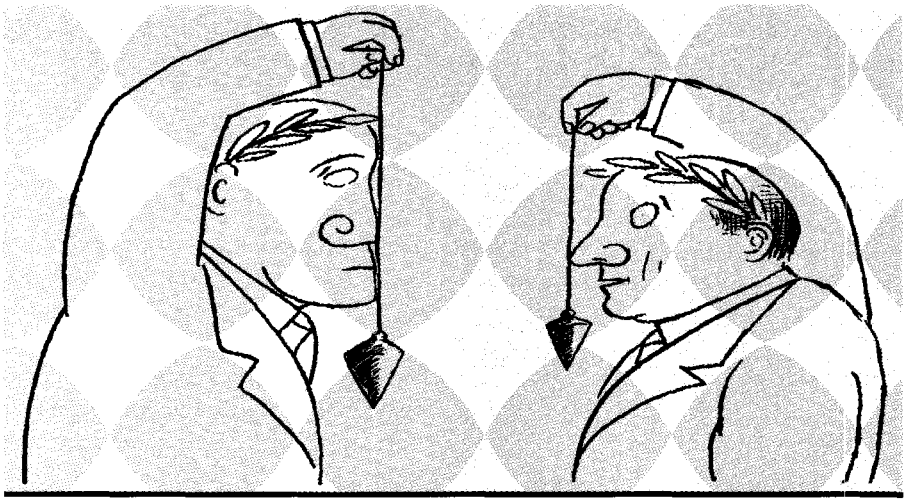

is narrow, dark, and toilsome.

But at this point there are some obvious worries. The problems that trouble Smith—problems to which being religious is presented as the answer—are those characteristic of prosperous citizens of late-modern democracies at the dawn of the third millennium. They are the worries of those for whom death by torture, gassing, bombing, or starvation is neither close nor real; they are, moreover, the problems of those who are quite sure that they themselves are not and cannot be murderers, torturers, rapists, and so on. It is because of this that Smith's identification of spiritual constriction and meaninglessness as the central problems of our age carries little conviction. His is an intelligent, clear, and lively book, but it is in the end a superficial one, one whose audience is prevented by their prosperity from perceiving the real and deep problems of our time. Smith's jeremiad touches neither genocide nor martyrdom, and as a result remains on the surface in its diagnosis of our difficulties and in its proposed answers to those difficulties. In those respects it is very different from Glover's stark and horrifying work on the moral history of the twentieth century.

Glover's intent is to give ethics a useful empirical aspect by paying close attention to what it is that we—and Glover's "we" means "we humans"—actually do, and especially to the atrocities we have so frequently committed in the twentieth century. This, he recognizes, requires close attention to history, and where the history is that of the twentieth century, the result will inevitably be the replacement of "the thin, mechanical psychology of the Enlightenment with something more complex, something closer to reality." Glover offers such a replacement not to encourage pessimism or despair so much as to help prevent the horrors of the twentieth century from disfiguring the twenty-first.

Glover begins with a brief history of moral thinking since Nietzsche. He concurs with Nietzsche that a recovery of Kantian confidence in the existence of an eternal moral law and in human capacity to know and act upon it is unlikely. Glover also thinks that traditional Christian diagnoses of the human condition as inevitably sinful—a diagnosis that requires every Christian to say, following Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15, that he or she is the chief among sinners—no longer carry conviction. These facts, he thinks, make of properly moral thought and action an attempt to build breakwaters against the human tendency to do terrible things rather than an attempt to discover eternal moral verities and live by them; and this in turn requires close attention to the kinds of terrible things we do and the reasons and causes that contribute to our doing them. The bulk of the book attempts to provide this, treating the moral psychology of waging war (with special attention to Vietnam and Afghanistan, and to the killing-at-a-distance exemplified by the bombing of Hiroshima), the nature of tribalism (with special attention to Rwanda), and the uses of state terror by Hitler and Stalin.

The bulk of Glover's book is thus a catalogue of horrors, set before the increasingly agonized reader in order to show in detail how genocide happens, how it can come to seem inevitable and even desirable that innocent people should be obliterated by the systematic fire-bombing of cities (a policy that, by itself, suffices to delegitimize the entire Second World War from the viewpoint of mainstream Catholic just-war theory), how co-operation in social policy that means the death of millions, such as the forced displacement and mass starvation of the so-called kulaks under Stalin in 1930s Russia, can come to seem the only possible option—and so forth. Glover's historical work, so far as I can judge, is careful and thorough.

The greatest strength of the book lies in its detailed analysis of cases. But the breakwaters he proposes to prevent or minimize the occurrence of such horrors in the future are flimsy, and this is largely because Glover has no belief in what he calls a religious moral law, and no confidence that such belief is still lively or widespread enough to help. In the absence of this—and there is often an elegiac tone to Glover's pronouncements on its loss, a tone not much different from (and just as historically mistaken as) Matthew Arnold's in "Dover Beach"—there can only be "an attempt to keep ethics afloat without external support."

This attempt appeals most fundamentally to the possibility that we might bootstrap ourselves out of our tribalisms by cultivating the moral imagination. It's a nice idea; but those to whom it will appeal are precisely those who (self-deceptively) don't think they need it. The truth is that if there is a bulwark against atrocity it's to be found only among those who are willing to die to prevent it, not among those who would like to cultivate the moral imagination. And that in turn means (as most of the readers of this journal will already know) that the only bulwark recognizable to Catholic Christians is precisely the constant cultivation on the part of every Christian of the sense of sin, the sense that each of us is always

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hovering on the edge of being a rapist, a killer, a torturer, a slaughterer of the innocent. Repentance and confession are the only things that will help at all, and even they won't help much. The dream of a world free of systemic violence is, in the end, a dream, and Glover, reluctantly, almost says as much. We can shore some fragments against our ruins and perhaps reduce the body count a little; but anyone who seriously expects more is living in a dream.

The thinness of Glover's response to particular atrocities is well illustrated by his treatment of the English Catholic philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe's argument against Oxford University's award of an honorary degree to President Harry Truman in the 1950s. Anscombe, who died recently, argued against this award on the ground that the just-war tradition, properly interpreted, makes the use of atomic weapons against cities an unjustifiable action and those who ordered and performed it murderers. The principal reason for this conclusion is that, in the case of a weapon like that used on Hiroshima, the killing of large numbers of innocent noncombatants is an intrinsic part of the action (and, arguably, among its intended consequences). Such actions cannot, Anscombe argued, be defended on the ground of the just-war theory, even if they have other good consequences. The intentional taking of innocent life has no defense. On this ground Anscombe, unsuccessfully but with passion, urged Oxford not to honor Truman.

Glover's response to this episode is revealing. He endorses Anscombe's conclusion and excoriates her opponents for moral failure. But he does not endorse her argument, and this principally because it "assumes a moral law whose authority is independent of its consequences for people." By this Glover means, in part, that the source of the moral law appealed to by Anscombe is God, who is the supreme authority. But it is exceedingly odd to say that this authority is independent of its consequences for people. It would be better to say that a Catholic like Anscombe identifies the consequences that count differently than does someone like Glover, who cannot see beyond the possibility of quantifiable effects here below. Anscombe took sin seriously while Glover does not, and this permitted her a moral response to atrocity of a depth and power barred to Glover. This weakness is evident throughout Glover's book, and is a direct result of his rejection of the possibility of a moral stance grounded in a response to God's gift.

Good jeremiads encourage repentance. Glover's does this, and it deserves to be widely read and discussed for that reason. He is abundantly correct that a proper response to human evils requires detailed knowledge of what those evils are and how they come to happen. A close reading of his remarkable book has much to teach about the texture of human sin in the century just behind us. □

Paul J. Griffiths *is the Schmitt Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago.*

CROSS FERTILIZATIONS

Food's Frontier
Richard Manning
North Point Press, $24, 225 pp.

Margaret L. Zupancic

The so-called Green Revolution of the 1950s and 1960s, during which most of today's agricultural techniques were developed, has been largely credited with averting worldwide famine. Even so, there is a growing consensus that Green Revolution techniques are not only insufficient to feed the projected population increase of the next twenty-five years, but that they may have caused serious environmental damage through pesticide use and "monocropping"—the growing of a single crop over a wide area for a long period of time. In *Food's Frontier*, Richard Manning describes nine agricultural research projects being carried out in the developing world, all with the goal of assuring a secure food supply in a manner that minimizes both environmental degradation and the depletion of natural resources. Unlike the original Green Revolution, in which farmers all over the world adopted only a handful of crops and agricultural techniques, securing the future of the food supply, Manning argues, will require a multiplicity of green revolutions, each tailored to the ecosystem and culture in which it will be applied, and the countries requiring such revolutions must adopt their own methods for change.

Manning provides ample evidence to illustrate the importance of localized, bottom-up agricultural development. Pest-control methods that work on weevils in the southeastern United States are useless on the same insect in Africa because of differences in the mating habits of the African and American varieties. Wheat that is resistant to the scab fungus in Europe and America is devoured by scab in Asia, where wetter climates make life harder for the wheat and easier for scab. Cultural and political influences play a role, too. Farmers in Uganda refuse to grow the more nutritious varieties of sweet potato because these are too sweet for the Ugandan palate. The Chinese government demands wheat in return for farm subsidies, forcing farmers to monocrop wheat rather than rotate it with other crops. War, AIDS, political corruption, and lack of education play their part in preventing food production from working as efficiently as it could.

While some readers may be bothered by the fact that the Minneapolis-based McKnight Foundation funded both the scientists' work described in the *Food's Frontier* and the writing of the book, Manning's message is worth hearing. Perhaps the book is best thought of as the McKnight Foundation's internal report, written to be accessible to the lay

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person, as it gives a largely optimistic, though honest, account of the realities of world hunger and malnutrition.

A crucial step in solving the problem is the education of scientists in countries where better agricultural methods are most needed; again and again Manning stresses the importance of allowing these countries to develop their own agricultural and scientific infrastructure. He criticizes Westerners whose solution to world hunger is to dump their own unwanted food on hungry people. In his description of the current research, we learn that emerging agricultural methods vary from region to region, and can involve anything from rediscovering ancient Incan farming practices to dissecting mechanisms of pest resistance in a laboratory.

The venture into the lab setting leads Manning into controversial waters. These days, it is difficult to discuss modern agriculture without mentioning genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. Although *Food's Frontier* is not primarily concerned with genetic engineering, three of the nine projects Manning describes do involve transgenic techniques—that is, the manipulation of DNA by modern molecular biological methods. While acknowledging that genetic engineering does pose risks, Manning is right to point out that agriculture is an ecologically risky enterprise and that genetic engineering is only one of many arguably "unnatural" techniques currently in use.

Certainly, the broad range of techniques Manning describes allows the reader to view genetic engineering as part of a continuum, rather than a quantum leap, and to consider—as the author does—that the distinction between "genetically modified" and "nongenetically modified" may to some degree be arbitrary. Compare the development in India of pest-resistant chickpeas by inserting a gene from another plant with the development of pest-resistant potatoes in Brazil and Chile by crossing domestic potatoes with their wild relatives—a process which, Manning points out, could never occur in nature because the two potato species have different numbers of chromosomes. While most scientists would consider the chickpeas to be the result of genetic engineering, but not the potatoes, Manning argues that the similarities between the two projects outweigh the differences. Both are intended to reduce pesticide use and monocropping by the creation of plants which, while not naturally occurring, are similar to those grown by indigenous farmers in the pre-Green Revolution era.

Manning thus uses the example of GMOs to argue that agricultural solutions must be decided locally. This argument is not so much an antiglobalization invective as an expression of concern over the ecological aspects of agriculture. Green Revolution techniques, he demonstrates, do not always work as well as they could because they do not take geographical decisions into account. Technology involving genetic engineering—or anything else for that matter—has the potential of falling into the same trap. Ultimately *Food's Frontier* offers a word of advice to well-meaning Westerners on both sides of the GMO debate: the decision of whether and how to use new technology must be made on a regional basis, and tailored to the individual needs of each geographical area.

Manning occasionally falls into the trap of romanticizing rural peasant life, a characterization that his own descriptions of poor farmers in Africa and South America seem to contradict. And his explanations of the various research projects, while excellent at conveying the diversity present in modern agricultural research, rarely go into as much depth as one might like. Readers who want a detailed description of the science behind agricultural development will likely find the book somewhat superficial.

Despite these deficiencies, *Food's Frontier* has real merit, if only for its willingness to take up the thorny and often neglected question of solving the world hunger problem. □

Margaret L. Zupancic *is a research associate in microbiology at the University of California at Berkeley.*

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RELIGION BOOKNOTES

Lawrence S. Cunningham

In 1986 Gerhard Lohfink resigned his professorship in New Testament at the University of Tübingen, moved to Munich, and put his theological expertise at the service of the Catholic Integrated Community. The community was founded by a group of young German lay Catholics who, at the end of World War II, met to discuss the meaning of Christian community and to grapple with their country's embrace of National Socialism. Members of the community were determined to rediscover, in the Jewish origins of the Christian faith, the authentic roots of what it means to be Catholic. From the beginning, the Integrated Community invited theologians and other intellectuals to join them. They strongly opposed the German cultural practice of identifying Catholics or Protestants simply by their birth heritage and enrollment in the government census. In short, the community wanted to discern their communal identity as Christians as opposed to their membership in what Germans called the *Volkskirche*.

Does God Need the Church?
By Gerhard Lohfink
Liturgical Press (Michael Glazier Book), $39.95, 341 pp.

Lohfink's *Does God Need the Church?* is a work of biblical ecclesiology that advances four arguments. First, God did call a special people even though (and paradoxically) God's call is universal. Second, there are characteristic signs of Israel that perdure (gathering, faith, the Exodus experience, etc.). Third, Jesus and the Twelve are inexplicable unless seen in the context of the people of Israel. Last, the characteristic signs of the church should include the continuation of the Exodus and the gathering, a function of remembering and articulating faith, and a struggle for wholeness, against which disunity is a scandal.

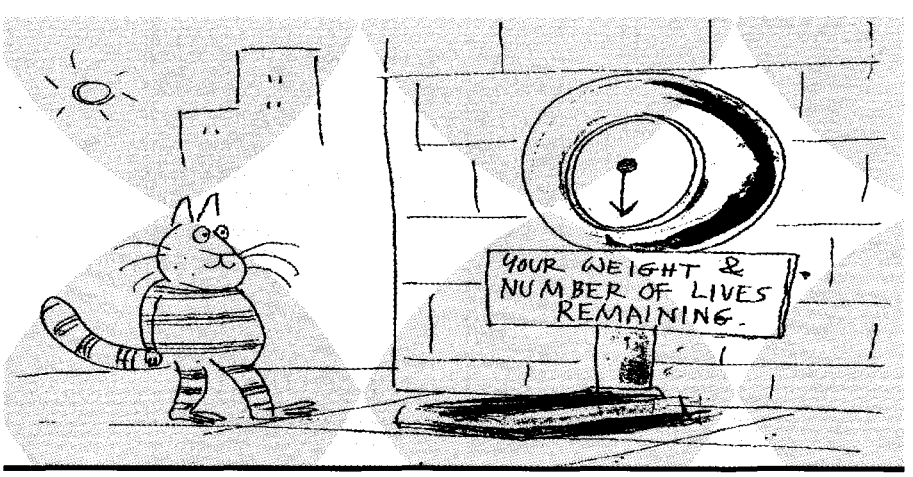
Lohfink repeatedly insists that the "newness" of the New Testament does not, and cannot, mean a repudiation of the "Old" Testament. Lohfink puts the issue bluntly: "It is usually forgotten that what happened in Galilee and afterward in Jerusalem was not something strange and alien to Israel; it was Jewish history." He firmly grounds his ecclesiology in the reality of the two testaments that constitute, for Christians, one sacred Scripture. Although that unity is evident in every Catholic liturgy, we need reminding; and so Lohfink dwells on Saint Paul's assertion that Christians dare not brag that they are branches since "it is the root that supports you" (Rom. 11:18).

The passion that fills this book comes from Lohfink's conviction that the church will not survive (indeed, in much of Western Europe it is dying) by feeding on a cultural memory of its past place in society. What it means to be a member of the Christian community must be seen free from pious nostalgia and fear of the world. Bible-based repudiation of Judaism and anti-Jewish violence are twined in European history. In a postscript Lohfink thinks back on his own childhood: "I saw men and women who were forced to sew a yellow star of David on their garments; then one day I didn't see them any more." That haunting memory has brought about this reconsideration of his faith.

Excellent close readings of Scripture secure the arguments of *Does God Need the Church?* Deep faith moves them forward. The question asked in the title gets an affirmative answer but one that is unsentimental and compellingly fresh. One would do well to read this book with a Bible close at hand as the fine insights Lohfink offers can be further considered thanks to a good scriptural and subject index.

On the Lord's Appearing: An Essay on Prayer and Tradition
By Jonathan Robinson
Catholic University of America Press, $26.95, 280 pp.

These days, books on prayer seem to sprout like mushrooms after a spring rain. Rare, however, is the book that attempts to understand prayer from a theological perspective. Jonathan Robinson's *On the Lord's Appearing* is such a book. As is fitting for an Oratorian, Father Robinson turns to Philip Neri to find the organizing principle for his discussion of prayer in the Catholic tradition. He notes that Philip loved to read the lauds of Jacopone of Todi, a thirteenth-century Franciscan poet. Robinson takes a Jacopone laud titled "The Five Ways in Which God Reveals Himself" as the template for discussing the ways of prayer. Those five ways can be roughly understood as liberation from the bonds of sin; healing through the agency of the sacraments and ascetical practice; developing friendship with God; entering into the dark mystery of God; and, finally, achieving union with God in love.



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Anyone who juxtaposes prayer and tradition will end up with a traditional vision of prayer. There is nothing wrong with such an approach but, given the direction of much writing today in spirituality (some of it, admittedly, odd and even risible), Robinson's volume does seem open to criticism. Let me advance some reservations. First, there is almost nothing in this work that sets the prayer life of an individual within a communal context. It is easy to forget that John of the Cross was not a solitary mystic but one who celebrated Mass, sang the office each day, and lived in a community. Robinson's only use of the sacramental life of the church to advance his theory of prayer is to invoke the sacraments under the rubric of "healing" while grumbling *sotto voce* about liturgical deformations after Vatican II. Nor is there any sense that the life of prayer should spill over into a transformed life for the sake of others. After all, when Teresa of Avila finishes *The Interior Castle* she says that the test of those who have entered the deepest level of prayer is rather simple: Do they love their neighbor?

If I found this work somewhat deficient in the context within which the author writes, I also confess that he has some very penetrating observations to make about the life of prayer. The book would have even been better had the author been more expansive in putting his doctrine of prayer into the context of the nexus between prayer and the larger world within which the one who prays lives.

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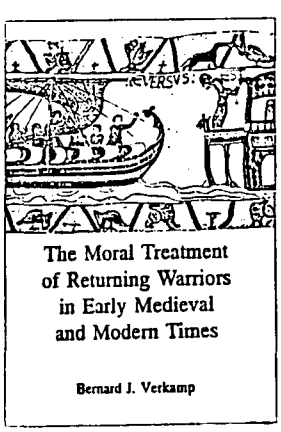
In the School of Love: An Anthology of Early Cistercian Texts
Edited by Edith Scholl, O.C.S.O.
Cistercian Publications, $29.95, 180 pp.

Saint Benedict called the monastic life a "school of the Lord's service" and some centuries later Bernard of Clairvaux refined that description, calling his community a "school of charity." Indeed, the emphasis on the affective love of God has been a leitmotif of Cistercian spirituality. Sister Edith Scholl, herself a Cistercian nun, has had the good idea of assembling an anthology of texts from the early Cistercian fathers and mothers. These works on the love of God are designed to be used as a meditation manual, book of prayers, or resource for *lectio*.

Scholl divides her selections into twelve brief chapters beginning with considerations of Cistercian anthropology and ending with the "perfection of love." There is an especially rich chapter on the blessedness of love that cites a number of texts on the beatitudes as well as another excellent chapter linking love of God with love of neighbor. All of these writers (Sister Edith gives us selections from ten early Cistercians) come across well in English. Their writings are unencumbered by scholastic neologisms, replete with scriptural allusions, and affective in tone. Brief biographical notes and a select bibliography close the book.

With very rare exceptions no selection runs more than a paragraph or two. The merit of such brevity is that one can take small doses, preferably reading them aloud slowly as an exercise of prayerful consideration (which brings



Bernard J. Verkamp
The Moral Treatment of Returning Warriors in Early Medieval and Modern Times

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Charles J. Reid, Jr., The International History Review

Hardcover, 1993, 195 pp.
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us very close to what *lectio* should be, as Basil Pennington points out in his brief introduction to the book). This is a fine anthology that would be a welcome addition to anyone's personal library. It deserves room on the shelf of any retreat house or other place where prayer is taken seriously.

The Poetic Imagination: An Anglican Spiritual Tradition
By William Countryman
Orbis, $15, 214 pp.

William Countryman's *The Poetic Imagination* is part of a series edited by Philip Sheldrake under the general title "Traditions of Christian Spirituality." Countryman does not intend to provide a global view of writers and movements that have flourished under the aegis of the Anglican communion. His sharply delineated focus is on the Christian life as seen in the tradition of English lyric poetry extending from post-Elizabethean writers to the twentieth-century poets W. H. Auden and Welsh priest R. S. Thomas. Rather than devote chapters to individual writers Countryman identifies four themes in four central chapters: the resources of image and language; the dialectic of presence and absence (of God); life under grace; and a living tradition.

The author wants to show that the poets he discusses have something classically Anglican about them, and to demonstrate to what degree the English lyric tradition addresses the present reality of Anglicanism, which is hardly defined by church life in the British Isles. His strategy is to admit the protean nature of Anglicanism (he says that what is unique about Anglicanism is its lack of uniqueness!) while insisting that the Anglican biblical tradition, mediated by the Book of Common Prayer, provides a common ground.

Such a case is obviously easier to make for figures like Herbert, Vaughan, Donne, Traherne, and moderns like Eliot and Thomas. It is less clear in a poet like Blake where other factors enter in (for example, Swedenborg). Be that as it may, the importance of this volume is Countryman's emphasis on the little-explored topic of poetry as a locus for shaping a vision of the Christian life. He falters when he attempts to wring out something specifically Anglican from poets (such as the Romantics) whose connection to church tradition was nominal and whose wellsprings of imagination derived from other sources. Coleridge would be the textbook case and nobody, I think, would wish to make a case for the late work of Wordsworth (for example, the ecclesiastical sonnets) when the poet was pretty much running on empty. Furthermore, Countryman's decision to focus on the lyric allows him only passing comments on Eliot whose "Four Quartets" is easily the greatest religious poem of the past century, though hardly a lyric poem.

Given the task Countryman has set himself, he has done a credible job. It was wonderful to reread some of the great poetry of the seventeenth century handled so sensitively. At the same time, I wish he had included prose writers, since that tradition within Anglicanism

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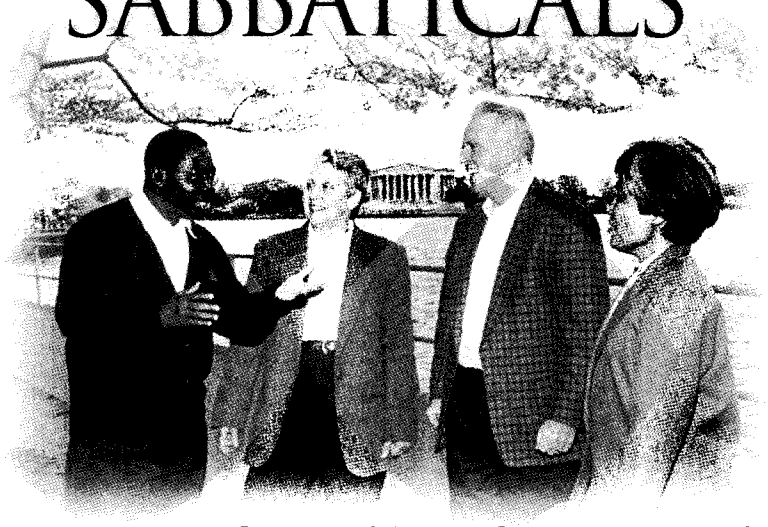

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is so rich and too little studied. Having just reread Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, I wonder if anyone (other than the writers of the collects of the Book of Common Prayer) has ever written more moving and deeply felt prayers and meditations.

Solanus Casey
Edited by Michael Crosby
Crossroad, $19.95, 275 pp.

Kenneth Woodward's *Making Saints* (1990) provides an authoritative and highly readable account of the process of canonization in the Catholic church. Michael Crosby's book on the American Capuchin friar Solanus Casey (1870–1957) gives those interested in saints and the saint-making process an inside look at the kind of dossier compiled for the canonization process.

Solanus Casey is a textbook example of the traditional candidate for beatification and canonization. A model Franciscan religious whose academic deficiencies were such that he was ordained to the priesthood but was not given faculties for solemn preaching or hearing confessions—a so-called *sacerdos simplex*—Casey exercised his ministry as a doorkeeper at various religious houses in Detroit. He never requested that his status be changed even though he was obviously average in intelligence, and his deficiencies were largely because of the bad academic training he got in a seminary where the texts were in Latin and the lectures in German. He had an extraordinary reputation for his spiritual counseling, the power of his prayer, his generosity to the poor, and his work as a healer. Thousands attended his funeral and, after his death, his reputation grew as many people invoked his aid in their prayers.

As these pages make clear, Casey derived his spirituality from the traditional sources set forth for every consecrated religious in his day: the Mass, the Office, devotional practices of the rosary, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament. The only peculiar side to his spiritual life was his lifelong devotion to the four-volume *The Mystical City of God* by the seventeenth-century Poor Clare, Mary of Agreda—a work which for a time rested on the Index. How Casey came across this strange work and why he read it all his life "on his knees" and encouraged others to read it is not clear although, in that period, there was a rather widespread taste for other rococo spiritual writers like Grignion de Montfort. There is no evidence in Casey's writings—consisting of his spiritual notebooks and his many letters—that he was in any way heterodox.

How the process of Solanus Casey fares (and every indication is that he was a person of great prayer and extraordinary self-giving) is not for us to say. What is interesting in this volume is the rhetorical tone that is adopted to make its case. The editor, Michael Crosby, has also written a good biography of Casey titled *Thank God Ahead of Time* (1998) that knits together more cohesively the story told here. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

But may I offer a piece of financial advice? Let him stay home even when *Romeo and Juliet* is the bill of fare, pocket the costs of tickets, parking, gas, etc., unplug the phone, pick up a volume of Shakespeare, and simply read the play out loud. I don't know the quality of Waffle's thespian talents, but surely the pleasure of listening to his own interpretation, an interpretation honed by years of loving the play, would be greater than witnessing a lot of half-baked impersonations. As long as Waffle confines his performances to the privacy of his den, he will surprise himself with an experience that is as enriching for him as it is incommunicable to others (though his immediate family might get a kick out of it).

As to his second point, Waffle queers his own argument and doesn't confront mine by offering the Bocelli disaster as an example. In spoken theater, as in the opera, a great artist, a true star, is someone in command of his medium. If Bocelli's incompetence led to a bad operatic performance, then he is simply not an operatic star, though he may be a singing star in concert and on recordings. But it is common practice in the world of opera for great talents to lend themselves to what Waffle calls "small venues." And, if the productions are completely tailored to the sacred monsters who are known as stars, so what? Better a glimpse of glory than a ho-hum uniformity. Best of all, of course, would be a star in a good production to which the star disciplines his talents.

Last year I witnessed Rip Torn (whose early reputation was that of an actor who ate directors for breakfast) fit himself quite nicely into the Hartford Stage Company's production of Tennessee Williams's *Camino Real*. Michael Wilson's production had a glamour of its own which meshed with Torn's star power. Sacred monsters don't always behave monstrously.

RICHARD ALLEVA

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MY CHILDREN AT SEA

William Houghton

The wind was gusty, kicking up whitecaps. It blasted from the northwest, then shifted abruptly to the northeast, striking the sail from the opposite side and making it crackle like a volley of pistol shots. I was no expert on a wobbly Windsurfer; the bucking forces dumped me into the lake. I climbed back on the board and hauled up the sail for another go. When everything clicked—the sail at just the right angle, one arm cocked, the other straight as I leaned back (letting my weight do the work)—then the board took off like a rocket over the waves. I had the brief experience of flight, only to have the wind shift and dump me again. On a warm summer day, the sun beating down and heating the skin, these frequent spills are pleasant, and the water itself is a welcome bath, the primordial soup.

Tired from this play one day, I sailed back to the pier where my young adult children waited their turns. Gabriel, twenty-nine, is tall and muscular. He easily wrestles the wind, driving the board forward on long charges, raising a rooster tail, as we applaud from the shore. Gillian, twenty-two, is also athletic, but not so muscular or practiced. Like me, she is learning. When the wind thrashes and misbehaves, she grows anxious, shakes, and slips off the board.

So when her big brother offered to give her a ride—he standing behind the sail as she lay belly down on the rear of the board—she was delighted and jumped on, the two of them wearing life vests.

I sat on the pier with a beer, the *paterfamilias*, lord of all I surveyed. But then there was a sudden shift in the weather: the sky darkened, the air cooled. I watched my children with a heavy heart, as, across the lake—three-quarters of a mile away—they crawled against the tree line. At that distance, their bodies were tiny commas, the sail the only way to spot them. Whoops! The wind must have picked up, because the sail flipped over, hardly visible when it lies flat on the water like that. Then up it popped again. They started to make progress, but then went over again, like a flame extinguished.

What caught my attention was Gillian's head, bobbing thirty yards behind the Windsurfer. Gabriel tacked the board in a circle around her, but didn't come near to picking her up. I wondered if the wind was too strong for him to maneuver closer to her, or if he was teasing her. It was impossible to tell at that distance. What was a father to do, a father who has spent decades looking out for his three children?

I jumped in the old aluminum canoe and paddled as fast as I could across the lake—no small feat. Now the water looked cold, deep, and frightening. When I got there, I called out and offered my help. Gillian was cheerful enough bobbing in the water. "I don't need any help," she said. "Gabriel and I are figuring out the best way to pick me up."

I don't think I was overly sensitive in hearing a touch of irritation in her voice.

"You guys were sailing great," I called out diplomatically, and slowly paddled back to our dock.

From my particular vantage point I saw the situation as dangerous; but who's to say? Sometimes I'm right—I think—to get mixed up in their problems, sometimes not. Human offspring need this risky exploration to test their bodies, to truly inhabit them, and to relish their sturdiness. Without risk and wrong there's no choice or mastery. It's like the fierce play of lion cubs: no skin broken. The point of my children's ruthless sport is to ward off concern that might be unreal, excessive, phony togetherness, in order to reach what is genuine.

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Even if Gabriel were teasing Gillian, that's a game two can play. I have seen her shriek in protest, and then stop it when she seriously objects. So they test what is real anger and real togetherness. From their point of view, of course, my love must be felt as suffocating, unreal, sucking them back into dependency. In sport and in real life, they must be ruthless in cutting me off at times, to escape my control and go about their business...As I did with my parents: not giving much thought to their feelings—truly I hadn't the energy to consider me and them at once...

God knows, my children have more serious decisions to make than how to handle a Windsurfer—where to go to school, what trips to take to other continents, which career to pursue, which partner to mate with. My problem is that I can't completely separate myself from their destinies. They grew on me, became a part of me. Now I must aspire to the talent of benign neglect. All a father can do is call it as he sees it, and have the courage of his mistakes.

I tied up the canoe and settled back in my familiar easy chair on the pier. On a rush of wind, Gabriel and Gillian sailed up stylishly, doing a final curlicue before splashing down. "We went so fast we were airborne!" they yelled.

And I called back, "You guys are terrific!" □

William Houghton *practices psychiatry in Milwaukee.*

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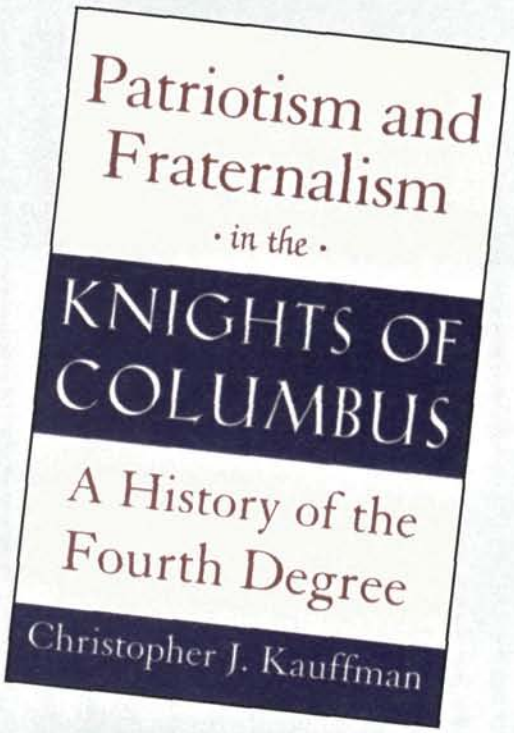

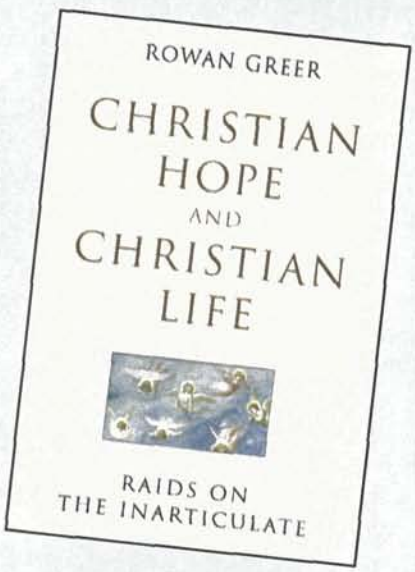

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